



**KYMN-
OVER-
AL**

OCTOBER 1986

Poetry	Cyril Dabydeen, McDonald Dash, Jacqueline de Weever, Ian McDonald, Pamela Mordecai, A. J. Seymour.	
Fiction	Excerpt from novel APATA Miss Lizzie the Herb Woman Culture Man	— Harold Bascom — Jacqueline de Weever — Ras Michael Jeune
Articles	The Practice of Biography A Report from Curacao "Has now Brown Cow" (English Exam Results for Guyana 1960-1984) "A Dumb God Buried in your Granfather's Copper Trunk" (Indo Guyanese Poetry)	— A. J. Seymour — Elaine Campbell — David Cox — Jeremy Poynting
Reviews	Penguin Book of (Eng.) Caribbean Verse Tales of the Wide Caribbean Woodskin Early Childhood Education in Guyana	(Pamela Burnett) (Jean Rhys) (Joy Bland) (Elma Seymour)

+
820.5
K99

CONTRIBUTORS

- Harold Bascom — Guyanese novelist and short story writer; Heinemann is publishing his first novel **Apata** this year; lives in Guyana where he is also a well-known illustrator.
- Dr. Elaine Campbell — Former lecturer in English at Boston University, she gained her Ph. D with a study of West Indian fiction with particular reference to Jean Rhys, V. S. Naipaul, Wilson Harris and George Lamming; her present interest is women writers in the Caribbean and she recently presented in Chicago to the Modern Language Association a paper on Dutch Antillean literature, which **Kyk** has great pleasure in publishing.
- David Cox — M.Ed. Birmingham; lecturer in the Department of Languages and Social Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Guyana; has recently completed a study of CXC English Examination results in Caricom countries over the period 1960-1984.
- Cyril Dabydeen — Guyanese poet who was appointed Poet Laureate by the City of Ottawa in Canada for the period 1984-1986; his book of poetry, **Islands Lovelier than a Vision** will shortly be published by the Peepal Tree Press, United Kingdom.
- McDonald Dash — Prominent Guyanese journalist; playwright and producer; contributed to **New Writing in the Caribbean**, 1972.
- Dr. Jacqueline de Weever — Professor of English, Brooklyn College, New York University; has published poems and a book of fairy tales.
- Janice Forte — Research Fellow, Amerindian Research Unit of the University of Guyana.
- Ras Michael Jeune — Guyanese performance poet; has published small collections of his work including **Black Chant**.
- Pamela Mordecai — Jamaican poet; radio and TV producer, editor of **Caribbean Journal of Education**; has written many books for children.
- Dr. Jeremy Poynting — Specialist in studies of East Indian writing in the Caribbean; he is the founder of the Peepal Tree Press, United Kingdom.
- Jan Shinebourne — Guyanese writer resident in the U.K.; her novel "Timepiece" is shortly to be published by the Peepal Tree Press.

LA/AP
SER 2994

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
The One Essential Investment	2
Across The Editors' Desk	3
 Poetry	
Lives; After Romance—for Derek Wallcott	9
Gaiety; Process	10
Sunset To Moonset	11
To. No Music	12
In The Final Analysis; Nevado Del Ruiz	12
Essequibo Sequence: Caiman Fever The Poisonmaker; Last Of Her Race; Carib Bones	16
 Fiction	
Excerpt from "Apata"	21
Miss Lizzie, The Herb Woman	24
"Culture Man"	26
 Articles	
A Report From Curacao	27
How Now Brown Cow	33
A Dumb God Buried In Your Grandfather's Copper Trunk	39
The Practice of Biography	50
 Reviews	
The Penguin Book Of Caribbean Verse In English	57
"He And She"	59
Woodskin	61
Early Childhood Education in Guyana	62

THE ONE ESSENTIAL INVESTMENT

In this issue we carry an article by David Cox of the Department of Languages and Social Studies in the Faculty of Education at the University of Guyana on his research into English examination results in Caricom in the period 1960 - 1984. In summary, the results have been appalling, nowhere more so than in Guyana. The implications for the future are horrifying in view of our basic development needs, to say nothing of our literary and cultural needs.

In an article which appeared locally we expressed our views as follows :-

“The widespread ability to communicate clearly and concisely and to comprehend clear and concise communication is vital not for the sake of great literature or cultural sophistication, but because it is essential in the daily working lives of the farmer, the businessman, the engineer, the administrator, the chemist, the accountant, the agronomist, the banker and the thousand and one other movers and doers in society. In addition, the ordinary citizen simply functions better as a citizen if he has ingrained in him the fundamentals of good language. All men and women without exception benefit in the ordinary course of their lives from the ability to understand a logical argument, comprehend the exact meaning of words, and use language clearly in explaining things, describing events and discussing his or her or the nation's affairs. It is therefore dismaying to sense the decay in the proper use and comprehension of the English Language in the nation. This is not just a feeling one has, derived from everyday business and social experience over the past few years. We have recently seen the draft of a deeply researched study by David Cox of the University of Guyana on English Examination results in 7 Caricom countries, including Guyana, in the period 1960 to 1984. This study spells out the decline in devastating and scholarly detail. David Cox's study should be published as soon as possible and debated as widely as possible. Let us be clear what we are talking about. The inability to use and understand language properly handicaps a person for life. This is not exaggeration. Such a disability is far more serious than a deformed hand or leg or spine for instance. Hundreds of thousands of crippled, blind, and deaf people have made outstanding contributions to mankind. Not one person unable to comprehend clearly what is communicated or use language forcefully has ever made his or her mark in the world. In Guyana today we do not believe anything is more important than that this should be appreciated and acted upon. Greater emphasis is now being placed on the teaching of English in the schools. Much, much more should be done. Emergency Programmes to increase the number of trained teachers of English and double, tripled and quadrupled. The establishment of a publishing to improve English teaching standards in schools should be hugely stepped up. The National Library should have its budget for new books centre should go to the top of our list of priorities. There should also be greatly increased allocations for our bookstores to permit at least the purchase of the rapidly increasing number of excellent books pub-

lished abroad by Guyanese living here or in other countries. Mark our words, all such investment, including its element of scarce and infinitely precious foreign exchange, would be repaid to the nation and our society a thousand times in the coming generation.”

ACROSS THE EDITORS' DESK

CONFERENCE ON CARIBBEAN WRITING IN

U.K. — OCTOBER 23rd — 25th, 1986

The Commonwealth Institute, with the support of the Commonwealth Foundation and the British Council, is organising a **Conference on Caribbean Writing** to take place on October 23rd to 25th in London.

This is a part of the programme **Caribbean Focus '86** running from March to November, which opened with a Steel Band, Caribbean Food and launch of a magazine on March 22nd in association with British Airways. Following months presented Film and Video Festivals, a Bob Marley Day, a Cricket Festival with teams from Jamaica, Barbados, Antigua and Eastern Caribbean, a Queen show, a Calypso King and a Poem Competitions, Carnival Day Parade, Evening of Dance and Spotlight on Sports.

Part of the purpose of **Caribbean Focus '86** is to provide teachers of West Indian children in London schools with an impressive body of material on the cultural background of West Indian peoples.

WILSON HARRIS

Wilson Harris has written to us about the selections of his work from the old *Kyk* series which we included in the Golden *Kyk* No. 33/34 :

“I must be honest with you, Ian and Arthur, I am not sure I want anything I wrote for **Kyk-over-AI** anthologised in such special **Kyk-over-AI** numbers.

Certainly I would like to be consulted. There are creative/intuitive links running through an imaginative writer's work and anthologies may at times help to illumine these links. I hasten to say I cannot, in all fairness expect you to take such complex matters into consideration. The business of editing the magazine is sufficiently arduous. But, as you know, **Troy**, **Agamemnon** and **Charcoal** have all been subtly revised in the **New Beacon** re-issue. There are important reasons for this. I have no narcissistic attachment to the work I have written and certain intuitive clues arising in the fabric of the work necessitate certain alterations.

I am so glad you omitted the pieces you so generously referred to in **Assaying for a Golden Kyk**. I would have been happy to had you left out **Fences Upon the Earth**."

**BIM No. 69 — December 1985, edited by John Wickham, Colin Hope
Dennis Sardinha — Christ Church, Barbados.**

So the first thing to notice is that John Wickham has gained two joint editors in this ninety-two page issue. Fourteen poems are here, including work by Edward Brathwaite, Ian McDonald, Tony Kellman, Cornelia Frettlow and Travers Phillips. Two old-time contributors, Geoffrey Drayton, the novelist, and Harold Marshall, the short-story writer, are back with significant and welcome stories.

We give pride of place to Dr. Richard Allsopp's article "A European Leader in Caribbean Culture" in which he tells the story of Dr. Douglas McRae Taylor, a Cambridge Scotsman, who lived in the mountains of Dominica for nearly fifty years, wrote two books, 31 previews and 108 articles for learned journals in America and Europe, and so became a world authority on Caribbean creoles and **the** world authority on the Linguistic anthropology of the Amerindian peoples of the Caribbean basin. For this achievement, the University of the West Indies conferred on him a most well-deserved Hon. D. Litt, at Cave Hill in January, 1979.

**RHYTHM — and — RHYME — Anthology of poems from New Zealand —
April, 1986, edited by Barbara Whyte and
Hilda Phillips.**

Another valuable collection of the work of 102 poets from New Zealand and twenty-five other countries. Most noteworthy are two poems by Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal, a poem on kite-flying in Jamaica by R. L. C. Mac Farlane, and modern translations from a new anthology of Chinese poetry.

In previous issues there have been introductions to the poetry and the value of this issue would have been enhanced had that practice been followed.

We regret that, on going to press, news reached us of the death of Barbara Whyte.

**THE NEW VOICES No. 27, March, 1980 edited by Anson Gonzalez
P.O. Box 3254, Diego Martin, Trinidad.**

The highlight of this issue is the Poetry Day celebrations of October, 15, 1985 at the Trinidad Hilton Hotel, when :—

1) the winner of the grand Poetry Prize Competition 1985, Joseph Cummings of Trinidad and Tobago, received the first prize of \$2,000 (T. & T.) and the TNV certificate of merit. Thirty-one entries had been received from seven countries.

2) eleven poets were present and read their poems to a distinguished gathering.

The issue also carries twenty-two poems, one story and an important book review by Anson Gonzalez on **Movement of the People** by S. R. Cudjoe, the Poetry Day Address, and Letters from Barbados and Saint Lucia setting out the cultural and literary activities in those two islands. In his review, Gonzalez points to the crucial role the intellectuals have to play in thinking and formulating a comprehensive philosophy for Trinidad and Tobago.

DICTIONARY OF GUYANESE BIOGRAPHY (VOLUME TWO)

by **Arthur and Elma Seymour** — GEORGETOWN 1986

Elma and Arthur Seymour have produced a companion volume to the 1984 **Dictionary of Guyanese Biography**. Running to 95 pages, it contains 280 biographical sketches of additional women and men who have helped to mould modern Guyana. They range over the immediate past, like Rupert Dowden the Coops Giant, to the wealthiest or "most landed resident in the West Indies", Wolfart Katz, who received more than £63,000 as compensation when Emancipation took place. Dorothy Rice, the Ruimveldt estate field worker who gave heroic evidence in 1905 Riots is there as well as Dr. J. E. A. Ferguson who cut down the malaria rate in Peter's Hall by the use of quinine in 1908 and gained the Davson Research Gold Medal.

This book helps to make the Guyanese cultural identity a valued possession.

ARTHUR GOODLAND — OBITUARY

In issue No. 32, December 1985, we noted with great pleasure Arthur Goodland's fine translation of "**Macunaima**" by Mario de Andrade (Quartet Books). Shortly afterwards we received the translation made by Arthur Goodland of Darcy Ribeiro's "**Maira**" (Picador). This book gives us a sharp sense of wonder and makes us realise the sheer difference between the world of Amazonian Indian and our "Western" world. In his plot, which recounts the return of an Indian trained to be a priest to his native village, Ribeiro asks the question : once one has stopped being an Indian — in other words, once one has come into prolonged contact with a technologically superior culture — can one ever return to one's place of origin? Around the central plot, Ribeiro shows us the real world of the Amazon with its powerless or corrupt Indian Protection Service, its greedy and ambitious tradesmen and politicians, "pacified" and "unpacified" Indians, missionaries Protestant and Catholic, its grandiose (and threatened) natural set-

ting. **Maira** is worthy of the larger tradition of which it forms a part, and, what is no less important, it is an effective plea for the few remaining Brazilian Indians to be left in peace.

Both translations by Arthur Goodland, of **Macunaima** and **Maira**, have been widely noticed and praised. Sadly, we have now received news that Arthur Goodland died on May 24th this year. Although he left Guyana as long ago as 1971 his memory is treasured by many friends here. Ian McDonald writes :

“Arthur Goodland was one of the most remarkable men I have ever known. In his time in Guyana as Technical Director of Bookers Sugar Estates (1958 - 1971) he was celebrated as a great, enlivening, colourful and creative personality. Not only did he direct with vigour and imagination technical development in the main body of sugar factories in the country in a particularly dynamic era for the Guyana sugar industry, but he also became the foremost amateur archaeologist in the country and developed his talents as a sculptor to the point where he was honoured among Guyana’s greatest artists. His massive carving of the slave princess Imoinda, which now stands in the main lecture hall of the University of Guyana, is perhaps the greatest piece of sculpture in the nation. In Guyana also his interest in Amazonian mythology grew and he begun the arduous work of translation which was to bear fruit in his years of retirement near Recife in Brazil and then in Canada.

His two great translations of **Macunaima** by Mario de Andrade and of **Maira** by Darcy Ribeiro were finally published in 1985 to the delight of himself and his many friends. He was a man with a tremendous appetite for life. His joy in living to the full and feasting on the great range of wonders that the world offers warmed and invigorated everyone he met. Shortly before he died, in his last letter to me, in his 75th year, he wrote about the old bell he had once found in Guyana and donated to St. Catherine’s College in Cambridge, about Walter Roth’s translation of Thedor Koch-Grunberg’s **Myths & Legends of the Arakuna & Taulipang Indians**, about his memories of the performance of the sugar factory at Albion in Guyana, about the potential use of Guyana’s letterwood for making cellos in Canada, about Salvador Dali’s masterpiece **Santiago el Grande** which he had just seen in the Beaverbrook Gallery, and about the errors he had found in the successive translations of Aeschylus’s **Agamemnon**. He also wrote, “I think I notice unusual beauty more than when I was younger” and almost the last words of his letter were about a cruise of the Aegean he was planning : “I have numberless loose ends to deal with before departure”. If he had lived a thousand years Arthur Goodland would have always left numberless and wonderful loose ends still to tie up before departure”.

PHYLLIS SHAND ALLFREY IS DEAD

We regret to let literary West Inndians know that Phyllis Shand Allfrey died recently in Dominica at the age of 86.

Born and brought up in Dominica in a white upper-class and financially comfortable family, she was a family friend of Jean Rhys and she was active in politics and became Minister in the ill-fated West Indian Federation of the late 1950's. She is important to us for her novel **The Orchid House Constable** (1953) and her poetry **Palm and Oak**. These last are twenty-two poems, self-published in 1973, of which she gave a copy to AJS when they met in June 1978 in rural Dominica, where she lived. He recalls how they talked to the rustling of the leaves on the towering hill cliff behind them and the continuous sound of running water by their side.

The Orchid House is a historically accurate tale of the disintegration and decline of a white family, related by an elderly family retainer, as a new political order emerges in the island with the hope for a positive future for all. Fear and hope make the novel significant.

Palm and Oak has given AJS great pleasure with its strong supple vision. The name means that she has tropical and Nordic strands in her ancestry, but the palm comes first since she chose to live in Dominica. The poems fall into three groups — those with Caribbean interest, those with a main interest in the U.K., and those relating to her personal and domestic life.

In one poem she wrote :

Love for an island is the sternest passion
Lovers of islands dig, plant, they
build and they aspire

To the eternal landmark when they die
The forest covers up their set desire
They blend their flesh with their beloved clay.
There is a special feeling
Pulsing beyond the blood through roots and loam
It overflows the boundary of bedrooms
and courses past the fragile walls of home.

These poems are a testament of her life and a guide into the thinking of a generation and class now passed away.

GUYANA HERITAGE SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

(1) A GUIDED TOUR OF HISTORIC GEORGETOWN :

is the name of a well written account of the more important buildings in the capital city of Guyana seen on a tour which starts from the Pegasus Hotel, runs south to Brickdam, then east along Brickdam itself to Vlissengen Road north to Kitty foreshore and returns to the Pegasus through Carifesta Avenue. These are the broad outlines of the tour but it bends here and there to take in St. Georges Cathedral, the Promenade Gardens, the public hospital and a well known Sharples House. David Ford is to be congratulated on the thorough re-

search and the orderliness of the twelve pages with map and pictures which re-create the significance of the city's buildings.

(2) CULTURAL INVENTORY OF GUYANA — PHASE 1 :

Two joint Project Officers have been appointed to complete Phase 1 of the Cultural Inventory of Guyana by the Guyana Heritage Society, one to compile the material Immovable Heritage and the other to identify and list the Non-Material Heritage. Broadly speaking, the first embraces structures and buildings of historical and/or architectural consequence, from Dutch, British and Amerindian sources, sea walls, monuments and archaeological sites; the second comprises the folk tradition, social forms and expressions, eg. festivals, ceremonies and traditional foods and religious forms.

TOO BRIEFLY NOTED

Space is far too limited to review in any detail the great variety of interesting publications about Guyana and the wider Caribbean that come our way. This is frustrating because each of these publications deserve more than just a mention to do them justice. For lack of being able to do better, however, and in case any reader may have a special interest, we would like at least to notice receipt of the following publications :

Guyana National Library 75th Anniversary Booklet.

1985 Guyana Chronicle Christmas Annual, including results of the literary competitions.

1985 West Indies Cricket Annual, edited by Tony Cozier.

Proceedings of the International Round Table held in Georgetown, Guyana, to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Abolition of Slavery.

Journal of Caribbean Studies, Volume 5, Nos. 1 and 2.

"Caribbean Aspirations and Achievements" — 7th Annual Conference of the Association of Caribbean Studies, edited by O. R. Dathorne.

POETRY

LIVES

A beginning storm sets my blood racing
I imagine the past with drum-beats—
Atavistic again.

I am memory of the tropics
I listen to hoof-beats
In the careering clouds

I am watchful as always,
Meandering with each spell of rain,
Each set-back to the ground

I wait my turn
Stepping out with ritual;
I build canoes from the heat
Of my insides, skin bark—
Blood coursing round a cambium-heart

I am now Raleigh making up for lost time
I bend and turn through the winding thickets
My veins reek of silver and gold—
I am at the Orinoco

My eyes meet at the limit of ground and sky
I am history in the making
I am topsy-turvy once more



AFTER ROMANCE

for Derek Walcott

I

Plagued into becoming more of myself
I travel along this dreamer's path

Take the world as it is in me,
It is the only real place —

I am unable to conquer more of myself:
This too is epistemology, the ways

Of becoming ingrown like one's toenails
And being reminded of the burnt-brick heap,

The bird alighting —
Remnant of a lost paradise

II

With a realist's touch I consider
My father becoming grey, shaking

At his ramshackle bone; a brother next — —
News of an imprisonment; another night
Without sleep; oh the ways of keeping vigil,
The imagination's fugitive now
I scatter grains of rice while cockroaches
Scurry across a bed — — how a nephew slept
The night through; and, trying to hang the moon
From a pillow in a trade wind's rhythm,
I burn from all sides, feet and brain first;
Later, making amends, I become a somnambulist
Meandering through the thicknesses — —
I mythologize as much as you

CYRIL DABYDEEN

GAIETY

Gaiety's good for the heart
The turn of the jest and the smile
The veiled look, saying "ah here
Is the place to rest a while"
Even the call of a tune
Will gladden the ear, to gleam
In the souvenirs of delight
And pluck from time a dream
For nothing will sicken and die
But the heart that has no zest
And for recipe, sad lone lover
Oh, laughter and smile are best.



PROCESS

Love at the lips was touch
As sweet as I could bear
And always at lips' brush
The fastness of her hair
Fades deep within my breath
My soul inhales her own
And faintly in the kiss
I hear her spirit moan.

Fingers are pillars now
That stand within her hair
Rigid as love & cupping
The chalice lips as near

As flesh to flesh can crush.
Contact is made & soon
Spirits electric whirl
All passionate in tune.
My ecstasy forbids
Tale to be clearer told
Suffice it in her arms
The gates of heaven unfold.
Bodies give up their breath
In aromatic moan
And limbs have uttered now
What touch at the lips begun.

A. J. SEYMOUR

SUNSET TO MOONSET

A turned-down red cup, the sun
slides off the kitchen table
of the horizon;
and night, a soaking coffee stain
spreads as the black
coffee-grounds rain
pelts down through the air.

The sky is soon clear;
the moon, a large plate
of chinese **blanc de blanc**,
hangs on the shelf of night,
high over the roof tank;
the chinoiserie, white white,
drenches the street
in its light,
and cars and people meet
and move like bugs
bereft of sight.

The night
dissolves into morning;
westward the white
plate dims
as the sun turns
up its rim;
and the clouds are wrappings
of tissue paper
for the chinese plate
as it slips, slips
down to the river.

JACQUELINE de WEEVER

TO NO MUSIC

That is my quarrel with this country .
You hear them say — “April?
Spring’s on its way, come April”—
and, poor things, believe it too,
see them outside, toes blue,
in some skemps little cotton sk’rt
well set on making what don’t go so, go so,
And this big April morning
it make as if to snow — serious!

That is something that must
make a man consider : if you can’t trust
the way the world turn,
winter, spring, summer, autumn,
who you can trust?
When it reach April and you been bus—
sing your shirt for eight straight month, just
to keep warm, you in no mood to wait
one degge-degge day more—
not when you poor
and cold in the subway,
cold in the street,
cold where you work
where you eat
where you sleep . . .

But you don’t get a peep
out of these people;
“Well, spring is late this year,”
they say, toes blue
peeping out the open-toe shoe
and hug the little skemps skirt
tight round them, shivering
for all they worth.

Dem don’t agree with the coldness
and dem doan disagree :
dem walk to no music
and dat is misery.

PAMELA C. MORDECAI

IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS

In the final analysis
When the chill
clutches your bones
in an almost

everlasting lock
You want to come home
More than badly
to the sundrenched streets

Wind
Hard wind
cutting through the
wintry armaments
And the thought
tortures you
Of a pleasant promenade
on the old dutch wall

Cold
Forever cold
counting off the
calendar days
to blushing spring
And memories return
of the fire
In the hibiscus
On your hedge of dreams

White days, white nights
On the wide boulevards
Of winter infinite
And musing of sunset's
scarlet splash
Beyond the lowering river

Rains
Lead-heavy with
interminable stones
of depression
straying back to a pleasant
picnic in the deep woods
of Kayuka

I am Tropic's child
lost and away
in an iceberg cloister
slipping betimes
on the icy underfoot
Looking at the bagladies
selecting their
midnight ration
From a breadheap on the sidewalk
And then sequester
themselves in a nook
subterranean

And then I think
Of the freedom the sun
has offered me
to stand polestraight
And use my handkerchief

In the final analysis
When the chill clutches
your bones
The sun always gets
in your eyes

There are still so
many days
to gushing spring
with its promise
of greens and blues
Yellows and rainbows

I am Tropic's child
in the final analysis
It is time to go home
to my sundrenched streets

NEVADO DEL RUIZ

Grey is the valley of death
Grey the metal men
under the viscous
Grey the instant graveyard
Grey the final hand
In the surrender
Grey the rumbling, gorging
Lagunilla
Of flood — of fire

Ash Wednesday in Armero

Grey the death
in the eternal dusk
Grey the sky of tears

Aiee! Santa Maria!
Nevado is blown!

Grey is the weeping
Grey the souls
Twenty-thousand
And some

O toll the bells
in the high haciendas

In the long green hills in Manzinales
Far from the graveyard
Of grey Armero
Village of Dead

O toll the bells
Far away in the wide paseos
In the long avenidas
far away
Where the skies are blue

Where was I when Nevado
blew?
Should I weep some?

But men must die
if their death was not
in the diary of doom

And the children
happy with laughter
And the old men grey
with age
Now grey is the colour
of their eternal shroud

Omaira Sanchez, just thirteen
dead in the grip of love
For the shield of parents
protecting their unbloomed

For little Corazon
sparkling cherub
For little Felipe
Fleeing from the thunder
on ratchet legs

For the old lady
who was going to visit
the priest
down the broken street
To make confession

Should I still weep
a grey weeping?

I must weep
For each must some time
fear his own Nevado
I weep for myself

Grey is my weeping
Grey is my death to come
And toll the bells for twenty thousand
And some

When Nevado blew
I too went under
the viscous
In the flood of the fire.

McDONALD DASH

ESSEQUIBO SEQUENCE

I

CAIMAN FEVER

Cold wind creeping on the skin,
A shaking-ague deep in bone,
All night in and out of sleep,
Fitful skin-damp wakings every hour
And a restless dream recurring :
Huge caimans thrashing in the river
Tails beating the water egg-froth white
Eyes blazing as they struggle,
Musky odour rising in the night.
I smelled and feared the grappling beasts.

Shivering in a misty river dawn
I meet Majesta who minds this house,
Ancient-slow but cooks a perfect pot.
She gives a look and knows the whole thing true.
"You have the caiman fever bad".
(How can she know my deep-down dream?)
Her old bright eyes turn full on me :
"Caiman fever shake the bone".
She has the cure for me she says.
Cold water from a baked earth jar,
A pinch of golden powdering.
A dip of lemon grass put in :
Drink it off in one great gulp.
Taste of woodsmoke
And old nights
Moon in cloud-scud
Red jasper round the throat.

The powder like a golden dust
She pinches carefully from a stone box
With sacred ointments and white spider cloth :
Caiman's penis dried golden in the sun

Scraped to powder on a fish's spine
It's chased the fever
Down a thousand years
I will not dream the great beasts anymore.

THE POISON-MAKER

Travelled miles that day
Gold savanna sun to shadows of darkest green.
A day of such beauty
I have not seen before,
The air gleaming like the start of the world.
On the edge of forest
Hawks hanging in the blue heaven :
Black wings beat once
And they are aloft forever.
They have always been in this great sky
Eyes scanning the long horizons
Where suns have burnt to black the short-grass valley-fields.
Amidst orchid-covered granite blocks of white
Gold and scarlet cocks-of-the-rock sport and fight.
Then the dense-dark forest green :
In the cold creek canopied with branches
The bright, dark-red water runs like wine.
Mora-trees, breaking into new leaf everywhere,
White, liver-coloured, green, and deepest red
Stand like huge chandeliers in ancient rooms.

• • • • •

II

Flashing messengers of light and swiftness,
Grey-blue kingfishers lead downstream to a village.
Well-kept habitations in a green glade :
Bustle with life, women bake and cut,
Children play with rolling balls of silverballi wood,
Hunting dogs snooze amidst the cooking smoke.
Red-stained hammocks swing in evening air,
Strings of red beads are heaped for market day
Making mounds of brilliance on the brown earth floor.

• • • • •

Relaxed, at ease, on mats of yellow cloth,
Chewing Indian corn parched white as jasmine buds,
The men extend an unsuspecting welcome,
Offer pepper-hot iguana eggs and wild red cherries,
Cool, week-old paiwari spiced with sugar-gum.

Their eyes are black and impenetrably bright.
It looks a place well-settled in good routines.

• • • • •

Alone, outside the evening light,
Alone with black arrows,
Who is that man, wrapped in black,
Squatting in twin-circles of dropped black pods,
Crouched like a crow, stirring a black pot
Sizzling on red embers like a black cat spitting?
A chant of mourning comes from this figure of the night.
Why does no one approach him? Why so far removed?
Why will he never join the hum of life and light?
They shrug and smile like children who are happy :
“The poison-maker”, they murmur, “he is the poison-maker”.

III

LAST OF HER RACE

A walk in the morning :
Sun burning off the early mist,
River-bank ablaze with Lady Slippers.
Old hut in a green clearing :
No sign of fire-side or children.
Friends who know the forest :
“Come and see this wonder,
Maybe she’s a hundred years.
Talk to her, see if you can get her story”.
Room is misty with strong tobacco smoke,
Old woman in a corner croons and drools,
Lifts up her terrible blue-stone eyes.
Miaha, “last of her race”,
Frail, desolate, decayed,
Greeted no one in the mornings,
Relates no heroic deeds to anyone :
Children, children’s children, not there anymore.
All gone, all gone.
She wears one green stone of Amazon,
Amulet against the snake-bite threat,
The gaze of Spirits that accuse.
A trembling voice saying nothing :
Deer have grazed for long
Over the rain-worn tribal mounds.
Her cloudy eyes skim past
Missing mine by centuries
Seeking something deep, eternal, lost.

I am shy, I am ashamed,
Edge out into the sunlight,
Saying nothing to the picnics,
Breathe in the green deep forest air.

Old toothless woman comes and goes
In this forgotten place smelling of orchids :
Past and gone, the wind whispers,
Past and gone, the forest hardly stirs.

IV CARIB BONES

Ten miles along a logger's trail,
Greenheart in flower smelling rich and sweet
A camp abandoned long ago
Has nowadays a few huts rotted by the rain.
Enter the chief hut by a slack-nail ladder :
Three old men squatting down like stones
Convey a welcome with their shrunken eyes.
We squat and take small gourds of drink
Brewed wild cashew and sapodilla skins.
The ramblings of the old men grow wild
Soon others leave to hunt the angry pigs
And fish the clear, old, black as satin streams.
The old men begin a chorused chant :
Memories of remembering their father's father's tales.

• • • • •

The old men squat scratching withered genitals
Sucking pipes of scented, strong tobacco
Black tongues lick across half-blackened gums
The chant rises, falls, whispers, shouts
And ends
Where it begins ,
And they are stone again.

• • • • •

The Caribs were the great ones,
Greater than the tall trees,
No forest men could conquer them.
Out of the arm-bones of their enemies
They made flutes to sing their triumphs.
Courage was dear to them as life
Their war-songs sang of bravery alone :
No word for cruelty except for "love of pain".
Before they chose a warrior

They sliced his skin and rubbed in pepper bush
Tied him in a hammock filled with tiger ants
And if he made a sound he failed.
Fear they did not know,
Death they despised, a puny thing.
Battle was good :
To feel the heart beat fast
Was life itself,
The sweetness and the song of life.
The hearts of men they killed,
Dried in fires made of wood and jaguar bone,
They pounded into "chieftain's" dust
To drink with shining eyes like blood.
And when great warriors died
Their bodies wrapped in snake-skin shrouds
Washed and watched by chosen women
Rotted slowly under suns and moons
Until the flesh was ready to shred off
Then women cleaned the bones as bright as dawn
Painted the clean bones gold of sun and earthen black
And placed them in honoured virgin-woven baskets
Carried everywhere, more treasured than a home,
Such great bones last longer than gold or settlements.

• • • • •

Kept forever, the old men chant,
Forever kept, forever and forever,
Forever to match their courage against foes
To guard the people against defeat
To guard the people against all ill
To guard against the giants of the dark
Forever guard, these strongest of the strong,
For however long forever ever lasts.

IAN McDONALD

FICTION

EXCERPT FROM "APATA" A NOVEL

by HAROLD A. BASCOM

1954

Chapter Twelve :

Mrs. Bailey folds-in her lips and bites in on them everytime she comes down with the pressing iron to begin a smoothing run on Michael's short pants on the board. There's a hymn on her breath : "What a friend we have in Jesus," she sings lightly, "O what sins and griefs to bear".

"Beverley!"

"Yes Mommy?"

"Don't put wares on that window sill you know!"

"A'right Mommy."

Grumbles Mrs. Bailey, "Like you like to hear that man fret!"

Having made a smooth run to complete a neat seam she places the iron on the little coal pot. She picks up a shirt and shakes it out. In the background Beverley is bent over the sink and from below the smell of the seedy glue being boiled comes up to them. Mrs. Bailey wrinkles her nostrils. God, she whispers to herself, I don't like how that thing does smell . . .

"MIKE!" she hears her husband call below.

"Coming Uncle Joel."

"Calculate this thing for me man . . . you fast."

Mrs. Bailey shakes her head.

"But why Michael had to hit the red boy in the people place for?" she says aloud to herself.

"Why you like to talk to yourself so, Mommy?"

"Is only when you answer yo'self, you gone mad! So leave me alone. Plenty o' we does talk to we self. And don't fo'get that you have to go for that milk."

"No, Mommy."

Tomorrow, Monday, Michael goes to school. Mrs. Bailey sucks her teeth. This week would have been the last week in Jagnauth's school. Next term he should have started going to King's College. **Should have.** Not any more.

Why Mike had to strike the damn red-man son? She sucks her teeth.

“Mommy I’m going now for the milk,” says Beverley.

“Take the enamel mug!”

“Man Mommy —”, she begins fretfully.

“I SAY TAKE THE ENAMEL MUG! WHAT HAPPEN TO IT? WE BLACK PEOPLE GOT TOO MUCH STUPID PRIDE FOR ANY THING GOOD!”

Beverley sulks away to the bedroom, but Mrs. Bailey hasn’t seen her.

“Mike?” she hears Beverley calling from the bedroom window.

“Girl what you calling Mike for? Mike doing something for yo’ father!”

“He finish.”

Mrs. Bailey wishes he had not said it. She knows that there’s a tenderness between her daughter and Michael, but she doesn’t like it. She’s grateful to his grandmother Jane for bringing her up, but she still doesn’t like it. She’s a mother now. She’s her own woman now and no form of indebtedness should foil her judgement in something concerning her own daughter. **She doesn’t like it.** Likes Michael, yes; but this deep attachment between Beverley and Michael she doesn’t. She had told Joel about it, but Joel saw nothing to it, sees nothing to it and would do nothing about it. The most he agreed on was that, at those times when they both would be out, Beverley would stay with his sister who lives in Albouystown.

But Beverley and Michael are aware of why this arrangement was thought necessary. Between them they have agreed not to attempt love making at this time. On that score, a few boys have tried to scare Michael, “Boy you stupid boy! You saving up duh girl fuh somebody else to knock out before you!” But such taunts never did and do not now perturb young Michael Apata. He loves Beverley and Beverley loves him. He’s sure of that.

There’s a boy who Mrs. Bailey hopes Beverley would take to. He is the son of Mr Bernard the milk man. “Girl?” The milk man’s wife had said one time to Mrs. Bailey, “Like my Dennis liking Beverley!” The milkman’s wife had laughed at this point. “But that girl don’t even voonks on he. That Dennis liking Beverley is something strange. Even he father end up wondering if the girl got something special. Dennis is a boy who used to show no interest in girls. All Dennis friends got girl friends — some lil girl they saying they like . . . but that Dennis — Let me give you this joke.

“One day he father say to he, ‘Boy, when me dead you getting all them cow you see grazing on dat dam, you getting the butcher shop downstairs and the two in the market. And what? You ent going to get marry?’ Well Dennis tell he father that is not that he don’t like girls, but is just that he didn’ see no girl that he like!” She laughed. “But now is a different story. When Beverley come he does hussle to sell she milk and to give she extras too.”

“Well, if Beverley don’t like he, what we going do girl?” Mrs. Bailey had said lightly.

Mr. Bernard is part Indian part Portuguese part Chinese and a whole lot of Negro. His wife is a brown-skinned woman mixed also, who was a runner-up some years ago, in a popular beauty contest. Having come together they produced quite a handsome boy by European standards. Dennis's skin is creamy. The pupils of his eyes are hazel. His hair is like an Ethiopian's and his manner is tender as his voice is tender. To Beverley, there's something about him that is effeminate. She doesn't like him for whatever it happens to be. She loves Michael for everything even though if she's asked to detail those specific things that make up everything, she would be stumped.

But her mother likes Dennis Bernard and wishes her daughter, who'd soon be grown enough, could see him as a future husband. Inheritance is lined up for him. The procreation of children with opportune skin hues seems lined up too. And those are the things, the main things, Negro mothers can find themselves hoping to happen to their daughters in this time.

Mrs. Bailey watches Michael and Beverley as they walk out to the road. She feels the happiness they support between them. Mr. Bailey watches too from where he works, and also feels the happiness they support between them. Twist it turn it, he tells himself, King's College or King's College not, that boy will make a name for himself in this place, in this Colony.

The gimlet bites deeper into the mortise joint.

Mr. Bailey thinks of his daughter, "She like Michael . . . I thought they'd see each other as brother and sister, but . . ."

The gimlet bites deeper into the joint —

". . . things don't go the way we see things. Pearl wouldn't accept it. If Beverley like Mike and Mike like Bevy . . ." He scratches behind an ear. ". . . we can't put him out or send him back to Bartica because of that."

The bit of the miniature hand drill comes through. He pulls it out, makes a hole neat then blows through it.

The thing that baffles Mr. Bailey is Michael's calm settling to his fate after being denied the K.C. opportunity. To the man it just isn't natural. After it happened Michael was visibly upset and twisted about it. But now, three days later, the boy seems to be his old self again. Laughing and not at all reluctant to continue at the same school come the new term when he should have started going to King's College.

Mr. Bailey takes up the thin saw that can cut around corners. He brushes the silverballi wood shavings from the worn and ready work-bench then clamps the panel of wood on it, he will now cut into the shape of a shamrock. "If I said I understand that boy" he mumbles, "I'd be lying".

The footsteps of his wife recede from that part of the house that faces the road and he knows that, like him, she had been watching.

MISS LIZZIE, THE HERB WOMAN

by JACQUELINE de WEEVER

She seemed ancient, when I was twelve, but she may have been in the prime of her life. She lived alone in the bottom-house of the house we lived in in Vreed-en-Hoop, a woman of average height and square, chunky build. Her feet fascinated me, so unlike any feet I knew at the time — flat, broad, hard, and callused, covered with the red dust of the Vreed-en-Hoop public road when she returned from her journeys. She sold herbs, you see, throughout the surrounding villages, and would be gone for days at a time, walking, her feet said, from village to village.

Her bundle of herbs was a matter of endless curiosity to me. Dried sticks. Leaves in bunches, also dried. Small bouquets tied together. Whole small branches dried and tied together. All made a large, neat bundle she carried on her headcloth wrapped in a tight circle on her head. It was not a heavy bundle since it was all dried leaves. I did not know the names of the various plants and leaves, but I could see from their shapes and the different shades of green and brown when they were dried that they were of great variety. When she returned, days later, the bundle was almost non-existent, very much reduced, shrunken.

Sometimes she returned during the day, and I would watch her coming up the road, sauntering, sauntering, probably greatly fatigued. But some mornings, as I fetched water from the vat, she would suddenly open the door, her form filling up the small doorway.

“Morning, Miss Lizzie,” I would say.

“Morning,” was her reply as she set about lighting her coal pot.

I wondered if she made tea with any of her dried leaves. Most times I knew she made coffee because I could smell it as I prepared for school. Were her leaves only for illnesses? This intrigued me because I was a bit of a herb woman myself.

As a child I constantly caught colds, so much so that my mother always took me to the doctor. When we lived in Vreed-en-Hoop, near the Best Hospital for Tuberculosis, my mother's constant fear was that I would get TB. And I hated doctors and their stethoscopes, sometimes their X-rays. I found, in the long backyard overgrown with bushes, a balsam plant. I think someone told Aunt Carr that it was good for colds. Whenever I caught a cold, I plucked a leaf or two, held them over a low flame until they were swollen with their juices, squeezed the juices into a teaspoon, and drank it. In two days, the cold and the coughing were gone. I have often thought that if I could have packaged it, I would have become a millionaire. I was proud that I could get rid of the colds without a visit to the doctor.

So I was sure that Miss Lizzie's bundle held cures for all sort of things, illnesses I had never heard about, and wondered exactly what. I dared not ask, so locked up in her own thoughts she was, except when she was singing hymns.

Miss Lizzie was a Jordanite. She would take her place, at the streetcorner, at a table with a kerosene lamp, dressed in sparkling white with two women and a man with a shepherd's crook. Miss Lizzie would read from the Bible and the man would preach. Miss Lizzie and the sisters sang between segments of the preaching. One night there were two men. The newcomer was very tall and imposing, and that night he carried the shepherd's crook. He preached all night. We could not sleep because his voice boomed through the silent night, and Aunt Inez sat in the dark in the front gallery, singing the hymns, agreeing with the message, approving the message, saying every now and then — "An eloquent preacher, yes, an eloquent preacher." It was impossible to sleep. When the service ended, the Jordanites came to Miss Lizzie's room downstairs, but they were very quiet, and finally we slept.

Miss Lizzie sang her hymns in the early evening when she lit her lamp and read her Bible. I could see her from her open door as I went up and down the back steps doing my housework, or coming back from climbing the trees in the backyard. Our backyard was really wonderful, long and deep, full of fruit trees which became my refuge from adults saying do this and do that when I opted to read. I could sit in the top of the trees and no one could find me unless they knew where I was. I became an adept climber, even of shaky sapodilla trees. When the sun began to go down, I had to climb down and go back to the house, and as I came through the dusk I could see Miss Lizzie at her table before her lamp, reading. I knew it was the Bible because she read aloud, and I could hear her when I was near the backsteps.

I did not at that time connect the two images of Miss Lizzie with myself — the independent herb woman, owning her own life, answering to no one, making a living selling herbs, discovering the villages on her two hard feet, held some connection with the would-be herb woman curing herself of colds; or the woman reading by the lamp-light with the young girl reading in the trees. Only about two years ago I began to think about Miss Lizzie, who is surely dead by now. I began to wonder what kind of life she really had. Whom did she meet in the villages she walked through? Was she ever loved, this woman with the hard callused feet? All of a sudden, I began thinking about Miss Lizzie, as realistically as if she still lived. Slowly the two images seemed to move out of the mist, a heavy mist that sometimes comes up out of the Demerara. Clearly Miss Lizzie seemed to be moving up the Vreed-en-Hoop public road. Was it because, in my own way, I also wanted to possess and to own my life? Was it because I sensed Miss Lizzie loved her Book as I loved my books? Gradually, Miss Lizzie assumed weight and substance in my mind, and I wonder at the strange ways of human influence, how silently a woman who walked barefoot through the villages impressed her value and her strength on an unthinking twelve-year-old girl.

“CULTURE MAN”

by RAS MICHAEL JEUNE

Eh eh, look how meh pardna hustling down the road. Like he late foh something or the odder. Ah wonder whey he going? Hi wha' happening dey Pardna like you late foh some function or odder? Oh yuh going to the cinema! Nah I ent care to go, today is rest day foh me duh is why I jus' sid down hey, plus the fact that I really tired going in Astor an' Globe an' dem odder cinema to learn 'bout European culture. Wait yuh don't know duh is wha' all dem cinemas does show. Yuh don't know all dem dress styles, hair styles an' behaviour styles is straight out from house, pit an' balcony deh does come wid every movie. Yuh ent believe? Well look five years ago, a cinema show a movie call 'Saturday Night Fever'; since den the whole country vibrating wid disco every school child is a yankee dancer. Dat movie was a major breakthrough foh American culture. Oh! you ent going to see nothing like dat. You going an' see a Chineese picture. Yes, dat popular now. Chineese is in style. In Campbelville an' Newtown alone deh done gat eighteen Chineese restaurant. All dem farmers now planting pac-choy, cucumber an' bora. Yes is Chinese in style now.

How yuh mean whey dey come from? Dey come from China wid Wang Yu, Chen Sing an' Shoji Karada. Dey come wid all dem thunderkick an' snake-fist picture. Is a new ting dey got now name Third World Culture. How yuh mean I don't like nothing from overseas. I like 'nough ting from overseas: I like Brazil bus dat does carry dem children to school and dem workers to work. I like the boats, cause dis land got 'nough river. I like tractors cause 83,000 square miles lil difficult foh plow wid just cutlass an' fork. Wha? Of course I been overseas. Overseas nice, but I love hey wid all de hard time an' black-market; de housing problem and de water problem. I prefer unemployment ova hey, dan foh live pon welfare anyway else. Man, I tell yuh, after travelling overseas, I really get foh love this country. An' hear, yuh eva tek a good look at Bourda, Bourda Market is a rainbow a colours, Purple balanja, red pepper, pumpkin so yellow yuh mouth got fuh water.

Bone dry coconut an' sweet banana.

“Calaloo, four bundle foh dollar”.

“Bora, get yuh nice young bora”.

Is poetry how dem hucksters does holler.

Man ah tell yuh deh ent got no odder market like Bourda.

Watch, I prefer to buy me greens off a bag pon North Road dan in one a dem germ-free anti-septic overseas supermarkets; wid dey cash registers an' white-skinned sales girls. I prefer a plastic bag to a rubber-wheel trolley. Wha' is duh? Yuh think I got a point. Man I got 83,000 square points in tropical green. Man look yuh see I love hey, because hey is home. Is hey yuh an' I born an' is hey I got to meck living betta, but it getting late yuh betta hurry if yuh want to ketch de Chineese picture. Yuh ent worrying? Yuh going by Bourda an' ketch a two dollar mango — Yes man I in duh.

ARTICLES

A REPORT FROM CURACAO

by ELAINE CAMPBELL

Significant attention is being paid in the United States to Caribbean Literatures in English, French, and Spanish, but very little attention is accorded writing from the Dutch Antilles. Although considerable writing is being done in Suriname (but relatively little in the smaller Dutch Windward islands — St. Maarten, St. Eustatius, and Saba), any focus will be on contemporary writing from the Dutch Leeward islands known popularly as the ABC islands: Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao.

While collecting materials by Caribbean women writers for a contracted anthology, I found in Curacao a highly active group of women writing in English, in Dutch, and in Papiamentu. Sonia Garmers, Nydia Ecury, Carla van Leeuwen, Diana Lebacs, and Adriana Kleinmoedig-Eustatia, among others, unabashedly produce such popular genres as folktales, children's novels, television scripts, cookbooks, and journalism. But they also write excellent poetry, social critiques, and political commentary.

The women writers of Curacao take advantage of the three languages spoken in the Netherlands Antilles; they write largely in Dutch and Papiamentu, but are becoming comfortable in English as well. They espouse genres spurned by male writers and they exploit genres neglected by women in other Caribbean settings. However, the most interesting aspect of their writing, in my opinion, is their refusal to separate writing into high art and low art, and then subsequently type themselves as creators of one form or the other.

Another interesting characteristic of the women writers of Curacao is their relatively high visibility. For example, Sonia Garmers, the author of such novels as **Orkaan** (1977) and **Orkaan en Mayra** (1980) — both written in Dutch and published in the Haag — is a popular radio personality who conducts cooking classes twice weekly for her listeners. On the literary side, **Orkaan en Mayra** received in 1981 the Mienke van Hichtum prize in the Haag and in 1983 the Cola Debrot prize for literature in Curacao. Garmers' output includes seven books for children in Papiamentu, six cookbooks in Papiamentu, two books about black magic in Papiamentu, and **Tree Rosea (Three Breaths of Air)**, a book of thirty-six poems with Nydia Ecury and Mila Palm, also in Papiamentu. Her Papiamentu classic, known throughout the Netherlands Antilles and recalled with affection by a generation of expatriated Antilleans in this country and in Holland, is **Lieve Koningin Hier By Struik Ik U Myn Docht (My Dear Queen, I'm Hereby Sending You My Daughter)**, the Haag, Leopold, 1976).

Diana Domacasse-Lebacs, who has published six books in Dutch and five books in Papiamentu for children, has also produced educational programs for television as well as television productions of folktales for all age groups. Among Lebacs' Dutch novels written for young women is **Sherry, the Beginning**

of a **Beginning** which is about a girl's search for identity during the post-colonial period of her island. **Sherry** has been translated into Finnish and German. Another novel for young adults is Lebac's **Suikerriet Rosy (Sugarcane Rosy)** whose protagonist is a Caribbean girl who comes from the countryside to work in Curacao as a live-in maid.

Of special interest is Lebac's Dutch television series "Hartelijke Groeten" or "Fond Regards." Produced by the Dutch Humanist League, the series of six television programs presents a dramatised correspondence between Bea, a school-teacher in Curacao, and Emma, a housewife in Holland. Both women are in their fifties and have daughters who have studied together in Holland. The daughters have very different ideas from those of their parents and the mothers write to each other about their reactions to these ideas and about the feelings that these ideas arouse. Bea and Emma correspond about other situations as well, and a picture is formed of how the actions and reactions of the two women are influenced by their different cultural backgrounds. Some of the subjects treated are marriage, financial dependence, the empty nest syndrome, discrimination, and growing old. Jetshe Mijs is the author of the letters from Holland and Diana Lebac wrote the letters from Curacao. The originality of the series attests to Lebac's versatility as a creative artist.

Note should we made of Adriana Kleinmoedig-Eustatia who, unlike Garmers and Lebac, maintains a low literary profile in Curacao, restricting herself to the traditional role of folklore teller. Kleinmoedig-Eustatia writes only in Papiamentu and she avoids radio and television exposure. Her three softcover books are published locally by the Ministry of Culture and all three volumes carry the Papiamentu title **Mi Koto di Kuenta (My Bag of Tales)**. Published in 1981 and 1982, the volumes display the universal characteristics of folklore, peopled as they are by peasants and kings (no middle-class characters need apply), and by the personified animal characters of fable. Brother Goat, Brother Lizard, and Brother Turtle — singularly Caribbean animal characters — make their appearance, as does Kompa Nanzi, known in the English-speaking Caribbean as Anancy, the West Indian descendant of West African spider lore. With their inset chants and verses, their heavy reliance upon dialogue, their dissolution of the line between human and animal characters, the stories of **Mi Koto di Kuenta**, volumes 1, 2, and 3, are important contributions to the collected folklore of the Antilles. By enacting her folktelling role in print, appropriately in the indigenous language of the Netherlands Antilles, Kleinmoedig-Eustatia dignifies the role of the woman teller of tales while at the same time helping to preserve part of the oral tradition of the ABC islands.

Of an entirely different cast is the delicate poetry of Carla van Leeuwen, gathered into the collection entitled **Because**. Van Leeuwen writes in English and in Dutch. **Because** is evenly balanced in the two languages : seven poems are in Dutch, eight are in English. Titles like "If I Could," "I Remember," "If You Only Knew," "Introspection," "Choice" and "Silver Dreams" express the contemplative nature of the poems that generally convey a mood of gentle sadness. The poet's awareness of an ambiguous world is displayed in such lines as "At times/ you can/ and may/ choose/ which/ two/ wells to/ drink from/ well of

happiness/ well of sadness.” In a voice of greater disenchantment she explains “I had a dream/ and saw/ Mankind,/ Loving/ Living/ Sharing/ Caring/ Giving/ I went out/ and saw/ Materialism/ Money/ Egoism/ Jealousy/ Pride/ So I retreated/ . . . I went on dreaming/ of Mankind/ Loving/ Living/ Sharing/ Caring/ Giving.” **Because** is especially precious because it represents the only published collection we have of Carla’s verse written before she ended her life from the great span of Willemstad’s Queen Juliana bridge.

The most active and highly visible of the women writers of Curacao is Nydia Ecury. Aruban by birth, Ecury, like most of her sister-Curacaon writers, works in various genres. Her poetry collections, written in Papiamentu, include **Tres Rosea** with Garmers and Lebacs, **Bos di Sanger (Voice of my Blood)** 1976, **Na Mi Kurason Mara’ (Bound to My Heart)** 1978, and most recently **Kantika Pa Mama Tera (Song for Mother Earth)** 1984. Her children’s stories include **Di kon anasa tin korona (Why the pineapple has a crown)** and **E Fruta di Abrakazor (The Fruit of Abrakazor)** 1981 as well as “Un Mosa Balente” (“A Courageous Lady”) in **Nos Isla**, 1982.

Ecury’s theatrical involvement dates back to 1960 when she played in the Papiamentu version of Shaw’s “Pygmalion.” She has translated into Papiamentu Tennessee Williams’ “The Rose Tattoo,” John Peacock’s “The Children of the Wolf,” Jean Genet’s “The Maids,” and Carlo Goldoni’s “The Liar” and his “Servant of Two Masters.” One of Ecury’s more recent theatrical ventures was a one-woman show entitled “Luna di Papel” (“Paper Moon”). The multi-media, multi-language production with sections in English, in Dutch, and in Papiamentu combined Ecury’s acting and singing with musical interludes by a jazz trio. The production offered a curious medley of serious commentary on Antillean post-colonial situations with rather light social farce.

More uniform is Ecury’s essay written in English for a 1976 presentation at the Toastmaster’s Club Contest in Maracaibo, Venezuela. The prize-winning essay, entitled “My Native Language” opens with a Papiamentu poem by the late Antillean poet Laureate Pierre Lauffer — a poem full of drumbeat rhythm. The poem translations into an English prose text which opens with the line “Did you hear the African drum?” Ecury identifies the African drumbeat’s importance to the rhythm of Papiamentu and goes on to explain the legendary birth of the language. The word “Papiamentu,” based on an old-Spanish verb, “papear,” meaning “to speak,” indicates a language that remained exclusively spoken for many decades. The nasalization that is characteristic of the language is traceable to Portuguese, while Dutch contributed words with nordic sounds like *zuur*, *huur*, *brug*. Some English and much Spanish also figure in Papiamentu, as well as an occasional word with an African root.

Ecury’s explanation of the historical background of Papiamentu grows in “My Native Language” into a highly personal ecomium of the language, pitting it, as it were, against Dutch — the language of Antillean colonisation. “Op school moet ik te allen tijde Hollands spreken.” “At school I must at all times speak Dutch.” Arguing that proficiency in foreign languages is a necessity for the inhabitants of very small islands, Ecury nevertheless bursts into Papiamentu as her essay reaches its apex :

“Papiamentu . . .

The language that I heard as I was being rocked to sleep.
Do do do mana su yuchi.”

“Papiamentu . . .

The language that I heard as I stood at my father’s knee, looking up for guidance and advice.

Bibi segun lei, mi yu, i un dia, lei lo pretehe’ bo.”

“Papiamentu . . .

The language in which I said my first prayer.

Papa dios, hasi Nichi bon mucha.”

The collected poetry in **Kantika Pa Mama Tera** represents a new effort by Ecury to overcome the language barriers among the islands of the Caribbean. The retreat from Dutch that she documents in “My Native Language” is fully accomplished in **Kantika**. At the same time, in a gesture of outreach, she translates her own Papiamentu poetry into English while preserving the Papiamentu.

Simultaneous to Ecury’s concern for the cultural and political implications of the language in which her poetry is written is her attempt to achieve reconciliation on a more personal level. The ninth child of thirteen, Ecury is intensely interested in both identifying and resolving her familial relationships. She takes pains to explain that her great grandmother Francisca was a slave in Venezuela who migrated to Aruba. (Ecury=groom, her great grandmother’s name became the family name.) Francisca’s son by a Jewish shoemaker was Ecury’s grandfather who married a woman half-German and half-Venezuelan. Ecury’s mother, Juliao, was Portuguese and Ecury’s husband a Dutchman. Embracing all these racial and national strains with ease, Ecury turns in the poetry of **Kantika** to a very individual reconciliation: that of acceptance of her mother with whom she had a difficult relationship. The Mama Tera of **Kantika**’s title is both universal and specific. On the universal level, Ecury says in the title poem,

Mama Tera, k’a parimi,
Hesu’ bo yu su alma,
tin di krusa
un desierto largu
anto desola’,
su so.

In dwelling on your face,
Old Mother Earth,
my soul must cross
a desert vast
and desolate
alone.

Later, she makes her gesture of homage :

Ma at 'awe'
mi yu chiki'
a karisia' mi kurason
ku un kantika dushi
k'el a kanta
pa mi so.

And yet,
I bow my tired head
to kiss
your weary womb
because
I am a Mother, too.

On the specific and personal level, Ecury opens her collection with "Habai" ("Old Lady"). After verses beginning "Machi bieu" (Li'l old lady), "Machi leu" (Silly old lady), "Machi kens" (Daft old lady), Ecury concludes with "Machi prenda" (Sweet old lady) saying,

Sweet old lady
with your clogged up veins,
your widow's hump,
your eyes opaque,
I'll have you for my baby
for a single night, at least,
to hug you—kiss you—love you
before you cease the movements,
before you turn into an object,
cold and still.

The collection ends with "My Mother—My Child." In a narrative mode, Ecury relates her mother's jealousy of the father's best-loved daughter. Describing the widowed mother, Ecury says,

He's dead
and left with us
his grey
and pampered bride.

But, finally, the poem achieves reconciliation :

Love is love is love
its direction matters none
Peace, Mother-my Child.
Peace unto you, my dear.

On the subject of love, I wish to conclude with fragments from "Amor den Silensio."

Den silensio
di nos sekretu
bo poesianan muda
ta kantami un crescendo . . .

Within the silence
of our secret
your wordless poems
sing to me
a crescendo . . .

Den silensio
di nos sekretu
mi kurason ta boltu
habri paso
pa shen palomba
shen palomba blanku . . .

Within the silence
of our secret
my heart moves aside
to make way
for a hundred doves,
a hundred white doves . . .

Den silensio
di nos sekretu
mi sanger ta bira riu,
riu ki ta desborda',
ku ta inunda'
doloman di tur dia
di tur ana,
di tur siglo,
i siglonan, amen.

Within the silence
of our secret
my blood becomes a river,
a river that overflows
to inundate the pains
of all the days
all the years
all the centuries
and centuries, amen.

'HOW NOW BROWN COW?'

Mordant reflections on English examination results for Guyana, 1960-'84

by DAVID COX

LITTORAL

Their faces seem to speak of passion,
A passion sensed but never felt.
Embers without conflagration —
Tabulae rassed up . . .

INTRODUCTION

The attempt at poetry that appears above was written in 1972 or thereabouts. It is probably a little Romantic, but it should also be seen as ironic, since it hints at a positive alternative. At any rate, there seems little reason to change it in the light of developments since then and I would recommend its brevity and compression. The initial stimulus came from my perceptions of the responses of the secondary school students to whom I taught English Language and Literature, but I came to see it as a reflection of much of Guyanese society.

At the time of writing the poem, the mood in Guyana was optimistic and there seemed a possibility of changing things. Those with doubts had left, and those that remained were willing to accept some incongruities so that they could begin (or continue) to repay the debt to their nation in the only manner that has meaning — the provision for future generations. Nowadays, there is some pressure to change the second line to :

. . . 'A passion **neither** sensed nor felt'

In a way, this article is concerned with that change of feeling. Guyana was on a crest of optimism in the early seventies. Art, Literature and Music flourished (Carifesta was its symbol). Education was repaying earlier investment, dedication and interest. The Nation was literate. But, even then, there were undercurrents in the wave. It seems to me that we are now at the bottom of a complementary trough of equally intense pessimism. However, once again, there is choice. Within another ten or twenty years it seems possible to be on the crest of another, equally positive but necessarily different wave if we recognise and accept the failures of the past and present (and their origins) and aim for that distant time **now**.

Some may consider that what I will write about below is impolitic. Such a view is regrettable and I think short-sighted in the context of Guyana at this time. Governments come and go, but the Nation endures and the well-informed decisions that are made today will not be regretted at the millenium. Besides, to remain silent or comment obliquely on a matter that I believe to be of crucial importance to my nation, my profession and myself would be both immoral and unethical. (I hope that you will not also consider being candid as being 'old-fashioned . . .')

SOME 'GIVENS OF THE NOW'

Recently, I conducted research into the English examination results in seven CARICOM territories over the period 1960-1984. While the results are disconcerting in all the territories surveyed to some extent — especially as far as socio-political and socio-educational considerations are concerned — my immediate concern here is with my nation, Guyana.

Space does not permit a discussion of methodology, assumptions, limitations or analysis of the data, and I must ask you to take what I will outline below on trust for the moment.

Over the twenty-five year period, about 212,000 students entered for the G.C.E. 'O' Level/CXC (16+) English Language examinations in Guyana. Slightly less than 45,000 were successful, such that the percentage pass was 21% (approx.). Roughly speaking then, **for the last twenty-five years (i.e. to July, 1984) four out of five candidates have consistently failed to obtain universally-accepted evidence of their competence in the official language of their country and one of the most important languages of the world.**

Next, we should note that the numbers entering in 1960 and those entering in 1984 **were virtually the same**, (1960 : 4,622; 1984 : 4,579) as were those passing in the same years (1960 : 917; 1984 : 908). These data are particularly interesting when one considers that numbers entering in 1971 (the high point) were about 12,000 and passes about 3,000. There was a gentle decline to 1979 (10,697 entrants and 2,000 passes) after which there is a rapid decline to 1984 levels.

English Literature results at the 16+ exam level are as bad. About 119,000 entered over the twenty-five year period, and of these slightly less than 27,000 passed. The period percentage pass was thus about 22% or, **that is, four out of five also failed.** While more difficult to evaluate than the situation in language, this result does not indicate problems in reading, higher-order comprehension, awareness of values/feeling and, generally, the level of culture of the population over the period. (Alternatively, I suppose, this result may be seen as positive from a 'grass-roots' angle of vision . . .).

Numbers over the period **dropped by nearly 50%**. (Entrants 1960 : 2,420; 1984 1,287. Passes 1960 : 473; 1984 : 270). The high point was 1969 (entrants : 9,700 (approx.); passes : 3,300 (approx.)), and the decline from that point was roughly in a straight line to 1984 levels.

Advanced Level (18+) English Literature is somewhat better. About 2,200 entered for the 18+ exam over the period and of these 800 were successful—nearly a 36% pass rate. The peak year for entrants was 1973 (146 sat), but the peak year for passes was 1968 (53 passes) — five years earlier. However, it should be noted that there has been a marked reduction from 1960 (entrants : 69; passes 26) to 1984 (entrants : 26; passes 10). These figures have particular relevance to the numbers and quality of **potential** English teachers available to the system over the period **and** the overall fall in numbers entering and passing at the 16+ exams of later years.

Finally, (at this time — the research is progressing) a look at some of the population figures (as given by the **Population Census of the Commonwealth Caribbean : 1960, 1970 and 1980**) alongside numbers involved, is of more than passing interest. The tables below encapsulate the relevant data :

Table 1 : Guyana : Total population, 15-19 yr. cohort; numbers entering for and passing at the 16+ and 18+ English examinations 1960, 1970 and 1980.

Year	Tot.pop.	15-19 yr. cohort	16+ Lang.		16+ Lit.		18+ Lit	
			No. ent.	No. pass	No. ent.	No. pass	No. ent.	No. pass
1960	560,330	51,884	4,622	917	2,420	473	69	26
1970	700,000	47,600	11,800	2,800	8,850	1,800	118	43
1980	758,619	96,554	7,960	1,800	2,848	496	45	25

If the 'A' level figures (18+ yr. exams) are omitted (the numbers involved are infinitesimal and not central to the thrust of this essay) then the following picture emerges :

Table 2 : Percentages of 15-10 yr. cohort entering for and passing at the 16+ English Exams 1960, 1970 and 1980.

Year	E. Lang.		E. Lit.*	
	% ent	% pass	% ent.	% pass
1960	8.9	1.8	10.4	2.0
1970	24.8	5.9	41.3*	8.4
1980	8.2	1.8	6.6	1.1

[*Approx. figures based upon the finding that about 45% of the cohort entered for E. Language also entered for E. Literature in the seven territories over the period.] ,

What has been outlined above is, however, merely the tip of the iceberg. There are further 'givens' that are common knowledge (though perhaps less well documented) and these too must be considered in order to deepen an appreciation of the situation as it exists.

There has been a population explosion over the last twenty-five years and a consequent surge in demand for Education. There has also been large-scale emigration from Guyana over the same period. The first **wave** took place after the 1962-4 turbulence and prior to independence (1966). The second **wave** began in 1970 with the Arab oil crisis and probably accelerated after 1980. Many of the legal emigrants were skilled workers (technicians or professionals). There is a high unemployment rate — especially amongst the school-leavers.

Because of currency restrictions and production shortfalls, there has been a shortage of books, magazines, newspapers, journals and indeed of communication aids in general.

For a variety of reasons, there has been a contraction in intake levels at teacher training institutions and hence a drop in the output of graduates at all levels. (Besides, these graduates frequently feed the emigration torrent). Finally there is the high tax bill and the concepts of responsibility and accountability to the citizens and, value for money.

SOME PROBABLES OF TOMORROW

It is impossible to do more than touch very lightly upon some of the more obvious implications of what has been outlined above. Suffice it to say that the results to date are very unsatisfactory if not horrifying in view of our developmental needs and the fact that we have been 'masters of our own fate' for at least twenty of the twenty-five years surveyed.

First of all, it would appear that there is a crying need for scrutiny of what is going on (or is not going on) in schools in Guyana. Thus both the teaching profession and the Ministry of Education (at least) will need to do a great deal of explaining — in the first instance — as to how we came to be in this sorry mess. Perhaps the first question is one of the degree of trust that should exist. The second is one of the high taxes extant in Guyana. However, questions must also be asked about methodology, curriculum and administration/management both in the schools and in the Ministry as a whole. There are also the questions of overall policy and responsibilities (white, brown or other coloured papers on educational policy), ancillary staff, resource allocation (including books and furniture), finance, appointments, transfers, salary selection, the Teacher Service Commission, etc. There is also the question of Adult Education and distance learning, since neither tax-payers' children nor tax-paying prospective past-secondary students are always near secondary schools or other educational institutions.

Secondly, there is the area of Teacher Education and Training. Questions will again have to be answered about curricula, methodology, administration, staffing, salaries, training of staff, physical plant, finance and resources at both the University and the teacher training institutions.

These, then, are some of the immediate or short-term areas of accountability. But, there are the wider and long-term implications. If the normal replacement of generations is considered in the light of the need for literacy and language-based skills in an increasingly more complex society and world where the official language is English, then it can be perceived that the results and other developments over the last twenty-five years do not augur well for the immediate or the more distant future.

English Language is necessary for employment, promotion and further study. Since the number of satisfactorily-trained youth is small, then the **de facto** retirement age will rise and/or there will be mismanagement/incompetence. Hence the days of the 'well-earned retirement' are probably over. The large number of training courses and workshops, unfilled posts and temporary appointments **after** retirement that have been taking place over the last decade

or so in Guyana and the number of foreign consultants that regularly visit, lend support to such a view.

Another, and at least equally important aspect of English, is that of expression and creativity. Bread and butter issues aside, there is the whole question of mental and spiritual health that is bound up in the appreciation of Literature and its expression. Materialism and 'enlightened self-interest' can only serve to an extent. The areas of the feelings, trust and values in general, understanding of self and other, self in relationship to nation — like the value of Education — cannot be reduced merely to dollars and cents (US or otherwise) or slogans. Indeed, it is precisely **now** after we have tried various experiments (and, perhaps, found the 'bottom line' in terms of survival) that there is a burning **need for revisions and new visions.**

The new entrepreneurial class is in existence. Racial and cultural integration are well under way thanks to economic pressure, demographic factors, the education system and the rural-urban shift. These will continue. But, now that the tool has been formed, it must be tempered and magiced/imbued with purpose and vision or it will once again fragment when diversity ebbs. The tempering and incantations fall within the realm of the Arts and especially literature.

But, that is the 'brighter' side of the coin—the 20+% passes. Assuming a sufficiency of jobs, these people can be inducted into the system. However, there is also the question of the 60-80% **who do not pass** (or whose results are well below 'barely fail') **and, those who are not even given a chance to fail.** If we posit a link between expression and the ability to think constructively, then failure in English indicates weakness or worse in the ability to comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, assess as well as communicate easily and cogently. It can even indicate, a growing illiteracy. In effect, then, we are talking about of the **unemployables created** by the system (or lack of it . . .). This in turn implies dependency on the same age group that is working towards the 'well-earned' retirement and ease . . .

Out of this dependency will come various attitudes. Thus there could be/ is a growing resentment and a contempt for the 'meritocratic' system that made them into 'rejects'. Alternatively there may come a sort of lassitude/giving up, or a growing violence born of the frustration of an inability to communicate.

These attitudes could in turn lead to an increase in leisure — or youth — associated misdemeanours and crimes (littering, vandalism, robbery, rape, drugs) or teenage pregnancy — and a greater dependency. There could also be an increase in cults or the uncritical acceptance of different local or foreign life-styles out of their original contexts.

But perhaps it is time to call a halt to the horror stories. I was not seriously suggesting that the passing or failing of English Language or Literature is the **sole** factor responsible for a decaying society, merely to attempt to indicate (or underline) the importance of English in an english-speaking society insofar as personal development, employment and the quality of life are concerned — **both now and in the future.**

Nor am I attempting to single out any group or organisation for more blame than they deserve. Education — be it in English or any other discipline or area, is **the collective responsibility of the society** and can only be delegated temporarily. The situation that has developed here is no one's fault if it is not **ours for letting it happen**. If the youth are an investment in tomorrow, then **we** (and/or our stewards) have scandalously mis-spent both the capital and the interest, and bankruptcy looms near like another Haiti. It remains to be seen, now that more information is to hand, what **we will do . . .** I, at any rate, would like to be able to write a companion piece (to the first poem) entitled 'Los Dorados' in about ten years or thereabouts. Help me.

'A DUMB GOD BURIED IN YOUR GRANDFATHER'S COPPER TRUNK':

Indian Religious Sensibility in Indo-Guyanese Poetry

by JEREMY POYNTING

There has been a significant but not surprising gap between the attachments of a large majority of Indians in the Caribbean to their ancestral Hindu and Muslim faiths and the detached, ironic and sometimes highly derogatory portrayals of the practice of Hinduism and, to a lesser extent, Islam in Indo-Caribbean fiction. V. S. Naipaul's *Mystic Masseur* (1957) and H. S. Ladoo's *No Pain Like This Body* (1972) and *Yesterdays* (1974) are but the most obvious examples of novels written out of the fear that the gods were dead and the certainty that Hinduism had become absurd in the Caribbean.

It is not the purpose of this article to explore the reasons for this division between popular attachment and the detachment of these novelists. One may take as exemplary V. S. Naipaul's moving account of how his westernising education in Trinidad and England made him incapable of living within his ancestral world view.¹ Yet even in Naipaul, with his self-confessed distaste for Hindu ritual, the process of separation is by no means complete. Novels such as *Mr. Stone and The Knight's Companion* (1963) and *The Mimic Men* (1967) show Naipaul wrestling with the stubborn vestiges of Hindu belief.

That tension in Naipaul's work is but a part of a much wider range of literary responses to the religious experiences of Indians in the Caribbean. However, because that quite sizeable body of work raises issues which are impossible to deal with in an article of this brevity, its focus is limited to a review of the way a number of Indo-Guyanese poets have expressed a religious sensibility which has been shaped by the transformation of Hinduism in the crucible of Guyanese experience.

In narrowing the focus in this way, two things must be borne in mind. Firstly, poetry is the form which has gone furthest in expressing the possibility, at a personal level, of fusing the ancestral and the Caribbean. By contrast, most fiction, including that by Indo-Guyanese writers, has focused on the social incompatibility of Hinduism and Caribbean secularism. Cyril Dabydeen's recent novel, *The Wizard Swami* (1985),² for instance, deals with the uncomfortable and corrupting experiences of a young, pious country Indian who tries to be an ascetic holy man in profane Georgetown. Secondly, although there is much in common, there are significant differences between both the experiences and its literary treatment of Indians in Trinidad and Guyana.

The Guyanese experience includes the fracturing, by time and distance, of an intimate relationship with India, the transformation of a caste peasantry into proletarians on the estates, the impact of Christian proselytization, missionary education and incorporation into the institutions of colonial and post colonial Guyana. The Hinduism and Islam brought to Guyana came in the main as village faiths, and though they remain meaningful to many, it was impossible that they should stay the same for all Indians.

The most blatant challenge to Hinduism and Islam came from Christianity and missionary education. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conversion, a condition of entry to the missionary-run secondary schools, provided the main route away from agricultural labour into professional occupations. The earliest members of the Indo-Guyanese elite — families such as the Ruhomons and the Luckhoos, for instance — were almost all Christians, as were the very first Indo-Guyanese to produce literary works in English. Yet even in the work of the earliest, most missionary influenced writers, one can observe an incomplete detachment from an ancestral sensibility. For some it was no more than the assertion of ethnic pride, but for others it was the urge to bring the Hinduism they had abandoned into contact with the Christianity they had embraced. In the work of Joseph Ruhomon, for instance, there are both the pious Miltonic poems on such themes as 'Easter' and 'Nosce Te Ipsum',³ which give no clue that they were written by an Indian or a Guyanese, and there are the curious idealist treatises such as **Good and Evil** (1916),⁴ **Signs and Portents** (1921)⁵ and **The Transitory and The Permanent** (1925),⁶ each of which aims at some fusion of the 'discoveries and speculations of Western philosophies' with the mysticism of 'occult and oriental philosophies . . . based on the revelations of the Yogi Fathers many centuries ago'. In particular, Ruhomon infuses his Christian speculations with a continuing adherence to the concept of *maya*, the illusory nature of the temporal material world. Similarly, a somewhat later writer, R. N. Persaud, in his **Scraps of Prose and Poetry** (1933)⁷ wrote both turgid Christian verses on 'Creation' and tear-soaked contemplations of hell, and also Tagorean influenced prose pieces such as 'East and West' where he defends Hindu India from attack by Western scholars. However, writers such as Joseph Ruhomon and R. N. Persaud were unable to translate the sensibility expressed in their prose speculations into any kind of poetry. The dominant tendency in their verse, and that of the Christian authors of **The Local Anthology of Indian Verse** (1934)⁸ was to write in an anglicised style on anglicised subject matter, leavened only by a discrete acknowledgement of the influences of Tagore and Mrs. Naidu.

That tradition of Christian-Indian verse, marked in its diction by the shaping influences of Victorian and Georgian English verse and the Presbyterian hymnody, has been continued by more recent Indo-Guyanese writers such as Leela Sukhu (**Scattered Leaves**, 1968)⁹, Randolph Butisingh (**Love's Light**, 1972: and **Wild Flowers and Other Poems**, 1972)¹⁰ and in the work of younger writers such as Krishna Prasad (**Born To Die**, 1977)¹¹ and Nadeer Bacchus (**The Golden Arrowhead**, 1978).¹² Butisingh's verse perhaps stands out for its greater technical facility and its gently reflective generosity of spirit, but as a whole this Christian-Indian verse presents its feelings in the borrowed language of rugged paths and ways strewn with tears, parched sinners and living waters, shepherds and lost sheep. If these writers deal with a specifically Indian-Christian experience, it is the expression of a sense of isolation, spiritual loneliness and despair. In 'I Want For Death', Bacchus writes :

I grow weary
Of this sad life
I beg you spectre
raise your scythe.

and in his **Life and Living** (1980), Prasad hears an African woman and an Indian man cursing each other and :

. . . silently wept
And wished that
I was not.¹³

However, the work of three other Indo-Guyanese poets, Cyril Kanhai, Churaumanie Bissundyal and B. Ramsarran, indicates that the limiting effects of the Christian influence on the writer's mode of expression were by no means inevitable. Kanhai escapes from the missionary straight-jacket through the toughness of his sensibility and the original vigour of his language. In the poems in **My New Guyana** (1969) he roots his Christian message of hope that love, divine and human, may purge the racial hatreds of the early 1960s in images which are drawn from the Indian experience of Guyana :

Deep Love and Hate
Together vie
In Heart Estate . . .¹⁴

and reinvigorates the idea of spiritual regeneration by avoiding the hymnody cliches of crystal streams and using metaphors drawn from the rice farmer's world :

May there yet spring
In the light of the day
From the scorched soil of the heart of man,
The torrents of love
Strangling every strange weed
and flooding the new land . . .¹⁵

Kanhai writes with great intensity, to the extent of verbal excess at times, but even within the eclectic freedom of his diction, one notes the familiar influence of the Presbyterian hymnody, in his taste for words such as "fulminate", 'satanic' and phrases such as 'honest toiler' and 'life's stormy waters'.

The other escape from the alienating anglicanism of the Presbyterian tradition was to return to the Hindu tradition from a Christian perspective, though some European missionaries feared that the process was more a case of the hinduisation of Christianity. One of the most interesting expressions of this process can be found in the work of B. Ramsarran in his **Glossary Of The Soul** (1967). As A. J. Seymour has remarked,¹⁶ 'Ramsarran's work is primitive in the best artistic sense of the word, both in terms of the idiosyncracies of his vision and the forms and language he uses to express it. One sees in his work the same flight from external reality ('the naked disdainful nature of the world') which has driven several Indo-Guyanese poets either towards mysticism ('the exalted hemisphere of supersensuousness') or inner searchings, as an all too understandable response to contemporary Guyanese reality : a 'world of falsehood and downright shallowness on all sides — a world of poverty, miserable old age . . .'¹⁷ The themes of Ramsarran's poems are narrow : the illusory nature of the world and the deceits of the senses, the divine and the diabolic as human qualities, moments

of revelation and the frustrations of being condemned to live within the earthly body. Frequently Ramsarran fuses Christian and Hindu approaches to these themes. In 'Freedom' he recognises :

Like as my God is called by different names —
Jehovah, Allah, Brahman, and many more . . .

and in 'God's Comment' he describes the wish for Christian bliss in terms of freedom from **samsara**, the cycle of rebirth in material, temporal form :

Passion binds one to desires for attachment to action
which is born of lust and hate
Purity elevates one to blissfulness and knowledge frees
from evil

Again, in 'A Magnificent Absurdity', the idea of a 'Transcendental Sanctuary' of oneness with existence owes much more to the Hindu concept of **atma** than Christian images of heaven. The syncretic approach works in both directions. In 'Maha Kali', Ramsarran tries to rescue the goddess's role as 'Mother of the Universe' from her association (and local Indo-Guyanese practice) with the sacrificial cult of Kali-Mai, arguing that the supreme creator and destroyer of all matter is demeaned by being idolised. Speaking in the voice of the Goddess, he writes :

Why should I disclose myself to you?
Perhaps I shouldn't be a lifeless image
Shrouded with terrifying esoteric misunderstandings
For all time.¹⁸

At his best, Ramsarran reminds of Blake or D. H. Lawrence in the argumentative freedom of his thought and the energy of his expression. In 'The Magnificent Absurdity', he attacks as simplistic the Christian notion of God and Satan as opposites and external to man :

What a magnificent absurdity
to tell man of Satan and God
as if they exist at opposite extremes—
One in celestial command to reign over high heavens,
the other in preposterous lordliness
to lure the sinless away to perish mercilessly in hell.

What appears to be satanic at one end
Is virtue vibrating at its lowest ebb,
What appears to be Godly at the other end
Is this very property with the print
of evil colouring apparently erased.

In other poems Ramsarran quarrels with his conception of God in the manner of George Herbert or Manley Hopkins, but though he shares something of those poets' colloquial vigour, he is a primitive without craftsmanship or discrimination. Too many of the poems are full of such mind-numbing abstractions

as 'miraculous infinitude', clotted with latinisms such as God's 'fondant power', man's 'oscitant course' 'flagitious thorns' and 'morbific muddiness', and larded with archaisms and the familiar Presbyterianisms of 'eternal mansions' and 'celestial cities'. Nevertheless, Ramsarran's verse is in the best sense curious and original, the product of a wrestling with a diverse religious heritage.

Churaumanie Bissundyal, writing under the name of Omartelle Blennesse-qui, goes even further in his long narrative poem *Glorianna* (1976)¹⁹ in describing a syncretic religious experience. At first glance, *Glorianna* might seem wholly *sui generis* as the account of a young man's vision of a goddess who comes to rescue him from 'the web of material glammers'. However, as the work of Joseph Ruhomon and Ramsarran shows, it has its roots in the contact in Guyanese culture of English verse, Biblical apocalypticism, Hindu speculation and the folk-culture of spirits and spiritual possession. The poem, like so much Indo-Christian poetry, expresses an isolated existence on a Hindu estate ('I was the treasure/ of no-one/ but my lonely self/ I was but a lonely observer/ looking on') and of flight from the external world of Guyanese reality.

It seems to me central to the significance of Bissundyal's work that the goddess should appear to the narrator in a form and name which are explicitly European, whilst those who are trying to destroy his faith in her employ distinctively local Indo-Guyanese means. Yet, if *Glorianna* comes 'apparelled in dazzling white' :

in the midst
of a host of angels
skimming over the river
and dancing in the sky . . .

she, as 'a great spark/ of this UNIVERSAL POWER', who is part of a female trinity which also includes mother nature and the 'Great Power', clearly also belongs to the Hindu tradition of female divinities, in particular Lakshmi. So, when the narrator's devoutly Christian father discovers his son's vision, he is convinced that he is in the grip of 'some pagan goddess/ come down to earth/ to pollute the world of Christ'. Anxious over his son, and his prayers failing, the father takes him to a mystic healer, a Hindu ojha whose appearance contrasts sharply with *Glorianna*'s whiteness :

He was robed in red
with a yellow turban
on his head
and rosaries
smelling of sandal wood
hanging down his neck
as if they belonged to the dead.

However, the mystic healer fails to cast out the vision, and the estate people take the young man to the seashore and make him 'the centre/ of a CIRCLE FIRE'. This time rains come in answer to the young man's prayer to *Glorianna* and the Hindu sacrificial fire is extinguished. However, the message the goddess brings the young man is far more compatible with Hinduism than with Christianity. She tells him that good and evil are not opposites :

. . . for evil is just a part of life
serving the purpose
of telling man
that he's far away
from his functions in this land.

Similarly, her teaching on the nature of reality falls back on the kind of pantheism found in the **Upanishads**. Things in nature are to be seen as aspects of the self, all part of the same formless unity :

The soft twittering of the birds
and the lonely calls
from the cows
were voices
coming from the horizons
of my awakened self.
They were voices
living millions and millions of years
within my soul . . .

There is much that is impressive about the poem : it has structure and coherence and communicates an esoteric experience very clearly. Its weaknesses are equally plain. The language is rarely inspired, the images emblematic rather than vivid and sometimes merely trite, and the goddess herself delivers her message in the tones of a platitudinous maiden aunt and occasionally like a pantomime fairy-godmother. Nevertheless, **Glorianna** remains a fascinating and always interesting attempt to explore a uniquely Indo-Guyanese experience.

But Bissundyal is very clearly not a reflective artist who is able to examine his own response to his experience and find a language and form which expresses its uniqueness. Rooplall Monar, by contrast, is highly conscious of his perspective. It is, indeed, the subject of his religious poetry, and though he does not always achieve a perfect mastery of a form which is equal to the complexity of his vision, he is very clearly striving for it.

Unlike the writers so far discussed, Monar writes from a Hindu perspective uninvolved with Christianity. However, no less than the writing of those discussed above, Monar's exploration of what Hinduism means to him is profoundly affected by his Guyanese perspective.

Monar's religious poetry is the extension of a search for an authentic Indo-Guyanese identity contained in a remarkable series of poems published in **Meanings** (1972) and in the journal, **Kaie** in the 1970's. They move between the hope that such an identity might have been forged on the sugar estates and fear that the history of oppression which has shaped that culture makes it impossible to embrace, and between a yearning for the ancestral mother and the cold consciousness that the umbilical contact has for ever been broken. 'Going For Lawah' expresses the fear that the ancestral gods are dead and are now no more than sentimental salves for the pain of separation. As the haggard old drummers beat for the marriage ceremony, they sense that their rhythms fail to vibrate the celebrants into any promise of fertility, and suspect that :

their gods are polluted
poor souls of sugar's ointment.²⁰

'Ishwar', expresses a dreadful sense of abandonment, and the god is called on to explain his silence and the meaning of the historical process which threatens the poet's cultural extinction :

Save me before I am lost
Let my children know
The purpose of my death
If not my birth
My Ishwar.²¹

In **Meanings** and the other poems of this period, Monar mainly explores the issue of identity in cultural and historical terms; in the poems of **Darling Of The Rising Sun** (c. 1975),²² it is taken up both in more intimately personal ways and in terms of a deeper religious questioning. The search for inner religious truth itself occurs at two levels. At the social level, he draws on a local tradition of spiritual resistance to what he sees as the ossifications of brahminical Hinduism. He finds this spirit of resistance in the mixing of South Indian traditions and the proletarian ideology of the sugar estate worker. At the cosmic level, Monar relates his own oscillations between hope and despair to the polarised impulses contained within Hinduism, between the image of energy and regenerative creation contained in the vision of Shiva's cyclic dance, and the yearning for escape from the cycles of rebirth contained in the idea of **samsara**.

In 'Darling Of The Rising Sun', Monar contrasts the hollow illusions of ritual piety with the living sacrament of sexual union, another image of Shiva's dance. He warns the brahmin girl to whom the poem is addressed that she gives herself :

To a god far away
A dumb god once buried in your
grandfather's copper trunk
A god whose potency reigns
in red bamboo flags flying in our yards . . .

I long to sacrifice that clay god
kissing your night sleep
and shape you in the likeness
of my own
God of the canefields.²³

The same spirit of resistance within Hinduism is even more extensively explored in 'Coming Of The Rain'. Here the ritualistic, venal and ethnically chauvinistic pundits are not only powerless to end the spiritual drought, but are in part responsible for its creation :

Once you know
pride transformed these frescoes greater than gods
as white-clad pundits searched the altars

for devotees' offerings.
How they smiled that smile of deceit
misinterpreting text from the Ramayan.²⁴

But the drought is also linked to the people's failure of vision because of their experience of servitude and their dependence on the hope of divine rescue. In the second part of the poem, the 'boom' is not only the thunder which ends the drought, but the sound of the iconoclastic overturning of the brahminical idols by men who look inwardly, and who by acting become gods themselves:

Boom!
mortal peasants tear the temple gods to pieces
bony hands challenge the omnipotence of the sky
Boom ! Booom . . .
Look!
closed, undisturbed eyes . . .
Men become gods.

However, this faith in the democratic human spirit is only one impulse in Monar's work. For he also expresses a tormented sense of division between the urge to be part of the cycle of creation and the urge to escape from it. In 'Birth', he sees in sexual union a replacement for the lost hope of finding cultural rebirth through social action. Here Shiva is invoked in his manifestation as the ithyphallic god :

Paralysed hands grasp for music
in the sanctum of sorrow
as Shiv's dances neared patterns
in confusions with penis and clitoris
until original
original birth appears.²⁵

However, in 'Metamorphosis', cursed by a sense of futility ('how many stars have poisoned my lineage') he looks for escape and considers :

Once I drowned between sea-beds —
who could wish a better death
than live with a curse in the forehead
of your Universe.

Here the sexual dance of Shiva, the snake-armed god, becomes a burden from which he wants release (**moksha**) :

. . . must I resurrect for a second birth
the wicked serpent again
for Shiv's dances enchant the cobra?
are we victims of this . . .
this timeless symphony?
Can our death beget our birth?²⁶

Monar brings these ambivalences together in what is to date his most profound and complex poem, 'Koker', in which he uses the landscape of the sugar

estate as a deeply thought-out image for his spiritual state. In the poem, the koker, the sluice-gate which, at the front of the polder, keeps out the sea water, and at the back of the polder controls the amount of fresh water let in from the savannah, is a symbolic boundary point between dry land and flood. The poem, which speaks in the voice of the koker, expresses the ambiguous antagonism and attraction between the two.

The poem begins by identifying the ocean, which the koker must keep out because its salinity will poison the soil, both with the attraction to the abandonment of sexual orgasm and, as in earlier poems, with the call of the ancestral voices :

Belly waves roll upon waves
climbing on top the other
as unfulfilled lovers do
tumbling in whirlpools
at the end of desire,
then come plashing me in the face
drunk with the power of temporal grace.²⁷

That freedom and grace is contrasted with the land within the polder, tormented by the sun, and the 'dual agony' the koker speaks of must be seen as both the endurance of the 'sun-cracked weather' and its separation from the sea, apparent but false source of fertility. The spirit is drawn to life (the koker is what makes cultivation possible) but is also frustrated by its captivity within material boundaries :

But who knows
who ever knows the beginning of this dual agony?

I still wonder at the endurance
of sun-cracked weather;
silent carrion-crow clouds;
white unending unending distance . . .

In the next stanza, Monar appears to allude to the Creation Hymn (Nasadiya) of the **Rig Veda** which begins :

There was neither non-existence nor existence then; there was neither the realm of space nor the sky which is beyond. What stirred? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, bottomlessly deep?²⁸

In this hymn and others celebrating the creation in the Vedas, it is the waters of unconscious matter which exist prior to the imposition of form through the generative heat of the sun, a metaphor which suggests that it is the heat of desire which keeps the phenomenal world of form in existence. Since this desire is the force that stands in the way of goal of release from **samsara**, the koker wonders :

Sometimes I question the futility of my birth
and the riddle of the proverbs —

(who first saw the maker of this life
or heard the first cry of this Creation?)

The koker thus comes both to long for the fresh water which brings life
and to feel the burden that the cycle of fertility brings :

I forever bear like pregnant paddy sheaves
everlasting burden of three month's rain;
savannah surging waters.

In its boundary position the koker is set between the world of man (the
land) and the gods (the sea). Sought out by people as a source of life and wisdom,
the koker is tempted to see itself as elemental and divine, but has to recognise
that it is man-made and can only be aware of but is always in some measure re-
moved from the mysteries (the 'unseeming tapestries') of the infinite :

They come
 lost little children
seeking my age-old counsel.
I turn to myself and ponder :
'Perhaps I am life-and-death . . .
yet I am neither
for unseeming tapestries continue to weave
and weave . . .'

Yet the koker is, though separated from the ocean, still intensely drawn
by its summons. Here Monar uses the images of sea and land to stand both for
spirit and matter and for the ancestral Indian call of the ocean and the parched
difficult identity of the Indo-Guyanese. The ambivalence of the koker's response
to the ocean's call is beautifully caught in the image of 'the wink of my eyes',
suggesting not only the glint of the sun on the koker's water and the idea of the
koker's relationship to the sea, but also the idea that the koker's understanding
of the ocean's message is both momentary and enlivening :

Out there in the ocean
Something silently speaks with me
and only the wink of my eyes understand
Am I sun or rain?
Am I 'fairy-godmother'
to crabs..... shrubs.....courida.....?

Monar's poetry does not always match the profundity of his exploration
of the split sensibility of the Indo-Guyanese with a corresponding technical ex-
pertise. Yet whatever these poems may lack in terms of structural coherence,
rhythmical certainty or verbal polish, they are unmatched as highly self-con-
scious expressions of a transformed Hindu sensibility in the Caribbean. Through
Monar's poetry, the dumb god buried in the copper trunk is given voice.

FOOTNOTES

1. See **An Area of Darkness**, London, 1964; and **Finding The Centre : Two Narratives** London, 1984.
2. Calcutta Writer's Workshop, 1985.
3. In the **Anthology of Local Indian Verse**, Georgetown, 1934.
4. Georgetown, Demerara Daily Chronicle, 1916.
5. Guyana, Berbice Gazette, 1921.
6. Georgetown, Daily Chronicle, 1922.
7. New Amsterdam, Lutheran Press, 1933.
8. Georgetown, Argosy, 1934.
9. Kitty, Sheik Sadeek, 1968.
10. Georgetown, Advance Press, 1972.
11. Wales, W.B.D., 1977. See also **Dawning Days**, 1976 and **Horizons of Life**, 1977.
12. Corriverton, 1978. See also **Shattered Dreams**, 1979.
13. 'The Row', **Life And Living**, Wales, 1980.
14. 'Love and Hate', **My New Guyana**, Kitty, Sheik Sadeek, 1969, p. 12.
15. 'The New Land', *ibid.* p. 17.
16. **The Making Of Guyanese Literature**, Georgetown, 1978, p. 55.
17. Foreward, **Glossary Of The Soul**, Georgetown, c. 1968.
18. 'Maha Kali', *ibid.*
19. Enmore, 1976.
20. 'Going For Lawah', **Meanings**, 1972.
21. 'Ishwar', **Kaie** no. 10, p. 29. (written under the pseudonym of Bramdeo Persaud.)
22. Typescript, c. 1974.
23. 'Darling of the Rising Sun', **Patterns**, Georgetown, 1983.
24. 'Coming of the Rain', **Darling Of The Rising Sun**.
25. 'Birth', *ibid.*
26. 'Metamorphosis', **Patterns**.
27. 'Echoes of Memory Koker', **Kaie**, no. 12, 1975, pp. 72-76. (Published under the pseudonym of V.D.B.).
28. W. O'Flaherty, **The Rig Veda : An Anthology**, Penguin Books, 1981. pp. 25-26.

THE PRACTICE OF BIOGRAPHY

A. J. SEYMOUR

A biography is the written account of the life of an individual. And what is an individual? Each man, says Archbishop Wm. Temple, is the Universe coming to self-consciousness in a particular focus, the self-awareness of the Universe finds a tower of reference of all creation in one observing eye. And, of course, an autobiography is the story of a person's life written by himself. There you have three definitions, two taken from the dictionary and one from the Archbishop of Canterbury which lifts the other two into the dimensions of philosophy and religion.

In 1978, when I was publishing the second part of my autobiography, I asked the question "why does one write an autobiography" and then I proceeded to answer it. I put down four or five reasons — first, to bear witness to the events of his life and show how the history of the nation is written although smaller in his own life, this is to say that social history both influences and is influenced by the observing eye. Second, to record his self-education, how his books and his wife and his friends and his job all conspired to create his personality with one particular viewpoint of selection from a seething mass of ideas and attitudes; what is important here is the element of unconscious selectivity that we exercise. Thirdly, to help the younger generation to know the facts and lessons of one's life, depicting the past now vanished for the people now alive — the truths and insights extracted from social forces to be submitted to the judgment of time. Since the cinema lens of history is always passing on to new frames of reference, young people are given a depth of cultural meaning of their own environment in this way.

In the fourth place, autobiography is an equation. He sees how the purposive and the accidental come together, if you like, the causal and the casual, how the chance arrival of a personality or an accident, can make a great difference in a man's life. Here we see how the playing by ear of the melody of one's life changes resonances and even direction depending on one's unconscious selectivity and chance. Here too you find the tension between a surface-event and the deep symbolic value of the episode which emerges with the years. Other reasons also present themselves — the yearning for dignity in one's own right, each of us wants to be important in our generation in some way, the reaching for a base of unquestioned personal authority. For a poet, there is the body of his poetry written and published as part of his life-writing, along with reflective memoirs. So we focus into the story of one personality all of these and other streams of invisible income and tribute, and you let judgment work upon memory in perceptions of creative change.

This is the unconscious and vague theory behind the practice. My own practice of biography began very simply. It was in 1965, I had an efficient shorthand secretary who never knew what she would be asked to put down — a sermon, a letter to the newspaper, or to the Prime Minister, a lecture or some draft of a book review. One day after she had typed a letter in which I made

certain remarks she suggested that perhaps I might like to put down some part of my life story and she would be happy to do it after working hours. So there was I with an offer which I was happy to take up and I dedicated the first book **Growing up in Guyana** in this way. Some time elapsed then I wrote by longhand part 2, **Pilgrim Memories** on lectures and visits to U.K., U.S.A. West Germany and Brazil in 1977. Part 3 came by chance. We were preparing for a family reunion on our 40th Wedding Anniversary to be held in Toronto and it occurred to me that since I was the tame writer in the family, I should mark the event, by writing out how I met my wife, how the children were born and how we grew up as a family, based on some of my memories, especially the cementing ones! My printer said he would do 100 copies, but I must give him four clear weeks before I left. So there was I, trying to write it all down, sometimes at 2 a.m., in order to finish in time. Then typing was the problem, but when the typist assistance ended, the printer said he would be able to read my hand writing and set it from that. I was very happy. The printer was as good as his word. The day before we left for Toronto I got 100 precious copies of **Family Impromptu** to take with us. This is a private publication in every sense of the words — in short a **privication**.

And then there is part four, **Thirty Years a Civil Servant** which came out in 1982. In 1983, I was fortunate to bring out another section, **The years in Puerto Rico and Mackenzie**, which follows on from the career I had as a national civil servant and from which I went on to work with an international organization and then with a multi-national corporation. I continue to write and I'm now drafting my travels as a cultural emissary for Guyana inviting Cuba, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Colombia, Dominican Republic and Haiti and Suriname to participate in the 1972 Carifesta celebrations.

Of course, there are deeper aspects of autobiography. A psychotherapist Chas Rycroft points out that the person writing an autobiography is engaged on a quest back into memory in which he encounters his past selves in a multiple and slowly-changing personality corridor, like walking down a long corridor of mirrors in which he sees himself at different stages. The writer selects memories in the light of his present conception of himself. Sometimes the memories press for expression, sometimes they resist and elude his imaginative recollection. So when the present "I" records the events in the life of the past "me", a dialectic is taking place in which both experience a certain amount of change almost imperceptibly, and at the event the I—me dialectic can be said to be "I wrote it" or "It wrote me". I mention this because it is important to realise that there are elements of self-justification, self-aggrandizement, confession and the desire to amuse among others all operating in the mind of the writer who is recounting his life.

One man suggests that all this special question of autobiography can be traced back to the 15th century in Europe when modern man took the place of medieval man. Medieval man considered himself as a member of society, but modern man came to conceive himself as having a self, an identity, which was defined in terms of itself and in opposition to, not its membership of, society. Jacob

Burckhardt in **The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy** mentions the great part played by Dante in this movement of history. Suddenly the individual is important and the famous person even more so, and he tells us how all local celebrities were noticed and their lives set down and there are two names, Bartolemew Facius and Pado Cortese, persons who collected facts and published books about famous men of the present and of the past, treating them as if they were members of one illustrious family. They lived in the 15th century which is a century of explosion of the concept of the personality, and the development of the individual.

Facius wrote **The Book of Famous Men** in 1445, only Italians, but by category,—poets, orators, jurists, physicians, painters, sculptors, generals, eminent citizens, princes and Kings. These were all contemporaries. Cortese in 1490 in **A Dialogue of Learned Men** dealt only with the dead, often the long dead, and by way of discussion with two scholars, and he concentrates on the eloquence of these Italians. What we have here is a **Who's Who** by Facius and a **Dictionary of Italian Biography of the Renaissance** by Cortese. We should notice that both books seemed necessary to satisfy public demand and curiosity, at that time of explosion of interest in the human personality. The thought therefore arises, there is a parallel between the sudden eruption of interest in the individual at the time of the Renaissance when modern man was growing up, and the explosion of interest in Biography in Third World peoples, as they pass from colonial dependence to independence of political action. Third World peoples partake of the same pride in knowing about the personalities who helped to form the modern nation.

One other contribution to autobiography comes from psychoanalysis. Autobiography deals with the conscious, but there is also the unconscious, and we are told that repression and resistance are the forces which block the way to our unconsciousness, because what is alarming, disagreeable or shameful, or in any way painful, has been forgotten as a defence.

This leads us to the biological drives covered by the ID, the conscious mental activities covered by the term the Ego, and the conscience of culture which carries the name of the Super-ego. There is a fascinating and subtle relationship among these during all stages of our normal development, and so what the life of a person has meant and what it deeply means at the present moment are part of the value of autobiography.

What has been the practice of biography in Guyana? The Reference Department of the National Library prepared for me seven pages of listings of books by Guyanese and yet that was incomplete. Looking at the record in analysis, I could see that teachers pre-dominated. The lives of Cyril Potter, Norman Cameron and remember the book which became a film **To Sir With Love**, that is autobiography made into fiction. Then G. H. A. Bunyan had put down a 60-year history of the Teachers Association in 220 pages, 1884-1944. There were two portraits of Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow one in 1949 and another in 1976. You would expect that, a life-story of a man who made an international and regional impact on working-peoples' lives. The life story of a lawyer

Hon. A. B. Brown was told by his widow Edith Brown — “Mamee” Brown as we called her. Denis Williams had devised a careful study of George Giglioli. Norman Cameron was there twice — in his own account of his adventures in the field of Culture and Joycelyne Loncke had done a booklet on Norman Cameron, the man and his work. Writers were well represented, we may say Edgar Mittelholzer, Walter McLawrence, A. J. Seymour, and Arnold Apple

P. H. Daly was outstanding. He published three collections of biographies in **Stories of the Heroes**. These contain valuable data representing considerable research in newspapers, and this information is little-known although one may disagree with some value-judgements.

What is the reason behind these and other books not chronicled here? The history of the lives of individual men and women is intended to give an artistic and truthful presentation of the individual with a sympathetic understanding of his character. We are talking here of the value of existence, about the worth of an individual and how to measure that worth, the intrinsic goodness or value, the excellence and usefulness of the years of living.

In the Guyana situation, we quickly became conscious of the colonial setting in which many lived their lives. Now that we have attained what we called political freedom, we give value to the cultural Guyana ground.

Take examples. In 1966, Cheddi Jagan in **The West on Trial**, devotes scores of pages to the conditions of his early life and how his father and mother lived, and then analyses the political and social forces at work as he sees them. He was searching for political freedom. Edgar Mittelholzer in **A Swarthy Boy** sets out his instinctive protest against the social conditions that surrounded him at home in New Amsterdam, just as he later protested living social conditions in the U.K., and many of his novels depict the determination of characters who by will-power carve out the framework of their own lives in improved quality.

The lesson behind the biography of Dr. Giglioli by Denis Williams is that a scientifically trained personality based on European norms had to investigate the scourge of malaria in his tropical environment, and so Guyana gains with the eradication of disease by DDT. Take Ayube Edun. He wrote **London's Heart Probe** and **Britain's Destiny 1928** as the expression of his personal philosophy and so criticised social life in London — the Royal Family, the Stock Exchange and the British working class. He used the selfless services rendered in India as a base and a hope and condemned the rottenness of the whole British structure. You see here the will-power with which he fought for the improvement of East Indian estate workers as a trade unionist.

Or just take the accidents of immigration, Richard D. Nurse was born in Barbados as the youngest of a family of eighteen children. Apprenticed as a carpenter to his father, he came to Br. Guiana in 1880, served under the most able and efficient contractors and went on to become a contractor in his own right. He built the B.G. Mutual Fire Insurance Buildings in 1894, Bourda Market in 1903, the National Liby in 1909 and Wieting and Richter Ice Factory in the same year.

E. Rupert Burrowes was born in Barbados in 1903 but spent his whole life in B.G. and became the father of the modern art movement in this country.

We talk about Barbados. From Antigua now. In 1878 a N.C.O. of Police named George Potter came to Demerara with his three young sons from the island of Antigua. One became a Minister of religion, Rev. George Potter, and in the second generation, we find those stalwarts of Guyanese intellectual and educational life — J. C. La T. Potter, E. A. Q. Potter and R. C. G. Potter as the N.C.O.'s grandsons. There is a cultural ground to all this. The heroes of Guianese society have been up to now the Colonial masters, Governor this and Chief Secretary or Chief Justice that. Then there have been some 12 to 20 English families, which have dominated Guianese life in the 19th century — the Austins, the Bayleys, the Campbells, the Davsons, the Kings, the Langs, the Macnies, the Seafords, the Smellies and others.

What we must remember here is that a first generation Englishman comes out to Guiana. He settles down, sends his son to school in England and then brings him back to live and work here, but at a high Executive level. Some of these 2nd generation sons may consider themselves Guianese; they make a contribution to our country's future. We have to consider them. Against that group are the up-to-now unmentioned and forgotten contributions of black and coloured Guianese who did not start high up the executive ladder, who did not have the education or the opportunities, but who by sheer persistence and will-power sometimes learning the language of the white contemporaries have indeed made a contribution to the present national heritage.

It is well to be conscious of this trend. Sometimes there is no record, or little record, of the contributions of what would have been considered as the important Guianese who was born black and often lower class. The editors of the day would have ignored them, so the faceless and unknown are many. In fact it is only in these more recent generations that the black Guyanese themselves begin to record their contributions. Many worthies of the past suffered in this way and are unknown today.

Take Alyce Fraser Denny. Legend says she possessed a remarkable voice. Quite by accident, I read that in 1929/1930, or 1931/2 when in England there was a coming together of all the Wesleyan and Methodist religious societies, Madame Alyce Fraser Denny was invited to sing as a Guianese in the Albert Hall at a concert to mark the occasion. This would be a great honour. What did she sing? Where else is this recorded?

There is another problem which has arisen. In the colonial days, whatever the Establishment did was right. When you thought of Cuffee as a rebel fighting against Baron Von Huggenheim, the Governor of Berbice, in 1763. you said the Governor automatically was right and the slave was wrong. This is how the historybooks have been written. Today with independence, and the desire to catalogue all the native and indigenous movements towards freedom as good, Cuffy was declared the hero Von Huggenheim is considered the villain. Do we revise the history books to show the new attitude? This is done

in some countries, e.g. Japan. With the Enmore Martyrs, you see the trend. The names of the five Martyrs are recorded with pride and the colonial police are said to have committed murder, and annually marches and speeches celebrate the deaths of these sugar workers.

Does this mean that the history books have to be rewritten for today's children? We speak in a small local environment, but UNESCO has had to consider the re-writing of the history books of the world in places like Germany England and France, and in Japan. How does one minimize the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima dropped by European people on Asiatic peoples? The issue here is that every national culture is to be considered as important as every other, say Guyana as compared with the United Kingdom, and it is the duty of the state or national conscience to provide the material for this pride.

It will be very evident that the practice of biography, and therefore of autobiography, becomes very important as a means of creating the material on which the national pride of Guyana may be built and to redress the neglect of decades and even centuries. Take our contemporary world of the Caribbean. In giving lectures to some groups of teachers, I have got the impression that for some of them life began only in 1966. They have no appreciation of the social forces at work in Guyana in the 1930s and the 1940s; the suspension of the Guyana Constitution in 1953 is not clearly understood and the trends and direction of the constitutions under which life in Guyana has been lived are not perceived.

One difference between a developed country and a developing country is that in the developed country anyone will have access to the memoirs of the leaders of the previous generation and therefore form in his mind slowly-shaping criteria of judgment by which to evaluate what is being done and said by the leaders of today. They tell us that every man, every woman, has in him or her at least one book, the story of the individual life.

What I'm saying is that more and more Guyanese should write the story of their lives to provide the web of social memory upon which the real identity of the young developing nation may be built. There is a surprising interest in the writing of memoirs today, and many persons say they are thinking of doing so. I give you an example. Arthur Davis of Sash Window fame, had lost his wife after many years of married life happily together. We met in one of the corridors of Bourda Market and we talked, and partly as a result he began to write his life story. Now that his autobiography has been completed, everyone who reads it is strengthened in a mental way. Walter Rodney in his two books on Guyana, **Sugar Plantations in the 1980's** and the **History of the Guyanese working Class 1880-1905** has shed a torch light of great illumination on the last twenty years of the 19th century and the beginnings of the Nineteen hundreds. These give us our history which we didn't know and build our national pride. We are intensely interested in learning more and more of our past nation builders.

I've talked to you about the practice of biography, told you how it happened in my case, and some of the reasons why a life story is written. Lightly

I've touched upon the psychological difficulties, the way this type of writing suddenly flowered with the Renaissance when modern man evolved from medieval man, lingered on the edge of the unconscious and looked at some of the examples from the Guyana scene. Of course, biography is social history as well as self memorising and in Guyana and the Caribbean our social history is rather thin. One question is who have built the nation? and what insights have they passed on to us?

There is a project being planned and executed, **A Dictionary of Guyanese National Biography.**

Every Fifth Former in a Secondary School in Guyana should be able to pick up a small reference book with the biographies in brief of 200 persons who are safely dead and who have made a notable contribution and helped to build the modern Guyana. For example, when you hear the name Edgar Duke as a model of scholastic excellence, or Robert Victor Evan Wong, as a promoter of wood pulp or Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, you should be able to check this **Dictionary** and find in two or three paragraphs what is the worth of the individual's contribution to the national scene. Where have the spiritual and intellectual forces of creativity been most at work in the Guyana national scene — the creativity that was responsible for the B.G. Union of Cultural Clubs 1943-1950, creating a vision of the intellectual capital of Georgetown life, the B.G. Dramatic Society for 18 years stressing the valuable in Indian Cultural heritage — in the man, the Macusi Bichiwung who was responsible for starting the Hallelujah religion — for James McFarlane Corry who, from 1904-1924 as President of the Village Chairman's Conference, and year after year led innovative and forward-looking debates on the future of rural dwellers, for the ingenuity of John Bradshaw Sharples who built all the railway stations and bridges between Georgetown and Rosignal and Vreed-en-hoop and Greenwich Park for \$85,000 in 3 years.

What we're talking about here is the angle of vision, the need for this particular age to gain whatever facts are available of the faceless anonymous of the past, and to interpret them and their record into a basis of hope and discernment of the future emerging from the past. It is to some extent an impossible task. James Rodway went through the newspapers available for more than ten years to write his **The Story of Georgetown.** Those newspapers have gone up in accidental flames or perished by culpable neglect. All we have now is Rodway's **Story.** A. R. F. Webber wrote a newspaper history of British Guiana in 1931, writing the text almost year by year. Now the newspapers have gone and his **History** remains. What is important always is that we in Guyana should concentrate our attention on this aspect of our social history. We need to do two things — to read the network of biography in Guyana more consciously and make an attempt of possession of it, and also, those of us who can, should consider writing the book that lies within each one of us and so add to the national biographical heritage.

REVIEWS)

THE PENGUIN BOOK OF CARIBBEAN VERSE IN ENGLISH

edited by PAULA BURNETT

To say it right away and briefly, this is a marvellous book. No one interested in West Indian writing, and I go so far as to say that no West Indian with any feeling for our literature and culture, should be without this book in his or her library. There are many lovely anthologies — the recent “Caribbean Poetry Now” edited by Stewart Brown, and “Facing the Sea”, edited by Anne Walmsley, spring to mind — but surely this is the most comprehensive and best anthology of Caribbean poetry in English there has yet been. Not the least of its merits are the excellent, mind-nourishing Introduction by Paula Burnett and the succinct, interesting, useful biographical notes. The Introduction by itself is a pleasure to read, written with great lucidity, full of invaluable historical information and analysis, and spurring one continually into new and fascinating avenues of ideas.

Of course there must be quibbles. What anthology in history has not been quibbled over? Every single person who gets an anthology, the first thing he does is lament what has been left out. It will be so with this anthology too. Personally I am sad that there is nothing here of Cecil Herbert or Owen Campbell or H. A. Vaughn or Harold Telemaque or Milton Williams. I would have liked to see more of Pamela Mordecai. I missed Eric Roach’s “Homestead” and “To My Mother” without which, for me, any Caribbean anthology lacks something. In the case of the major poets — Derek Walcott, Eddie Brathwaite, Martin Carter, Mervyn Morris — you always think of pieces that you would have dearly wished to see included. I think Wordsworth McAndrew deserved a place — his “Ol’ Higue”, especially as performed, is a wonderful example of the oral tradition in Caribbean poetry. Guyanese poets like Mahadai Das, Shana Yordan, and Roolall Monar would have been worthy of places and would have strengthened representation of the East Indian strain in our poetry, as indeed would the inclusion of one or two East Indian folk songs in the oral tradition section.

But when all is said and done, these really are quibbles. If Paula Burnett had had twice the 370 pages she had at her disposal still she could not have got in more than an inkling of what is valuable, such is the richness that belongs to Caribbean poetry now. And, to more than offset any personal quibbles, there were any number of discoveries, new to me. Horatia Nelson Huggins’s “Hiroona” was a completely unexpected revelation. James Berry’s poems, to my shame, I did not know before this anthology. Individual poems like Frederick D’Aguiar’s “Letter from Mama Dot” and Dennis Scott’s “Grampa” and “Epitaph” and Louis Simpson’s “Jamaica” and John Agard’s “Pan Recipe” and many others I had not seen before and already love. And, above all, the whole section with the oral poets, and Paula Burnett’s examination of the oral tradition in our poetry, gave at least this reader invaluable new insights into what is and what is not Caribbean poetry.

Blurbs, of course, are not to be trusted but it may have a special significance that the one on the back cover of this anthology highlights the vigour of oral

tradition in Caribbean poetry — “performance poets, dub and newspaper poets, singer-songwriters — Louise Bennett, Michael Smith or Bob Marley — (who) have created a genuinely popular art form, a poetry heard by audiences all over the world.” Even Edward Brathwaite and Derek Walcott are mentioned in the context of their “exploring ways of capturing the vitality of the spoken word on the page.” I think this advertisement — for understandable commercial reasons — does some injustice to the book which remains at its heart a marvellous anthology of the rich “literary tradition” in Caribbean poetry. Yet I do not doubt that the emphasis on the oral says something valid about this collection. I do not know of any other anthology that brings in “oral” poetry as comprehensively and as such an essential part of the tradition of poetry composition. This is surely an important departure and it will be difficult for future anthologists — Caribbean certainly but perhaps others too — to abandon the idea. “In the last 15 years”, Paula Burnett writes “a whole new cultural phenomenon has developed in response to modern technology, which has finally broken the old association of the vernacular with comedy, and is, in fact, a remarkable re-invention of an ancient tradition”. Her analysis of the emergence and blossoming of this “new” kind of poetry is fascinating and vital.

Of course, the danger is that one may go overboard in describing all kinds of calypsoes, performance songs, and acted words as “poetry”. How much of Bob Dylan is poetry? The Beatles? Neil Diamond? Kitch and the Mighty Sparrow? Yellow Man? Folk songs? Work chants? All or none? Presumably some, but how to decide the some? Is it a purely subjective feeling — “this is poetry”? Or can there be more objective criteria? I for one in this anthology, for instance, accept without any misgivings at all that the Dancing Songs recorded by J. B. Moreton in Jamaica in 1973, “My Deery Honey”, Louise Bennett’s work, “Get To Hell Out of Here” by Sparrow, “Guyana Not Ghana” by Marc Matthews, “Wukhand” by Paul Keens-Douglas, to name a few, are all poetry by any definition you may care to use and can never again, therefore, be left out of consideration when such anthologies are being compiled in future. Some other oral pieces I am not so sure about — but then is one so sure that all the thousand and one “poems” that jostle for inclusion in the literary tradition are themselves true poems? All in all the reading of this anthology has set me off on a search for poetry in the work of song composers, calypsonians, and dubpoets in Guyana — in the folk songs of which country I already know there is so much of the feel and music of real poetry.

Before concluding I cannot resist a small diversion which may be worth a footnote in any future edition of this wonder-full and valuable anthology. In it three poems by a Donald McDonald appear. The biographical note on Donald McDonald states simply: “Born Antigua. All that is known of McDonald is his volume of First World War verse, for which the proceeds were to go to the West India Committee Contingent Fund. Verse, rather than poetry, it is none the less competent, and typical of the period.” Donald McDonald was my great-uncle, the eldest of 5 brothers prominent in Antiguan life at the time, one of whom was my grandfather, Dr. William McDonald, still to this day affectionately remembered as “the children’s doctor” by many Antiguans. For years I had heard from my father of Donald McDonald’s “Songs of an Islander” but no one in the family

had a copy. Now, through Paula Burnett, I have been able to trace a copy in the library of the Royal Commonwealth Society to my great delight.

Donald Mc Donald's story is a sad one. His only son, Ian, in his teen became air hero of the First World War with 22 victories fighting in the fledgling Royal Air Force. After the War was over he came back to Antigua but grew restless and soon returned to service in the R.A.F. He was killed in action during an operation in Mesopotamia, still aged only 21. His death completely broke my great-uncle's life. His business, McDonald and Company in St. John's, collapsed and he had to sell out for a song. Soon after he died. Donald McDonald's young brother, my grandfather, married Hilda Edwards who also by coincidence wrote poetry. In her life she published three short volumes of poems, some of which, I am certain, will find a place whenever early West Indian writing is being considered. Both sides of my father's family, therefore, contributed in a new generation to my own sprig of poetry. One of the side pleasures for me in reading Paula Burnett's lovely, stimulating book was to find my great-uncle's poems, which I had never seen, and to be reminded of the ancestral roots of my own great love of poetry.

IAN McDONALD

"HE AND SHE"

MARC MATTHEWS and ZENA PUDDY.

Here in London we often hear Caribbean language used in drama and performance to stereotype or caricature Caribbean people, even with the best intentions. A rare exception to this was **He and She** with Marc Matthews and Zena Puddy as the principal performers.

Their choice of material was exciting. It gave full scope to both performers with their obvious love for the material. These were pieces which plunged us uncompromisingly into harsh settings. These were Roger Mais' **Yard Chorus**, Zena Puddy's **Rape**, Frank Collymore's **Ballad of an Old Woman**, Bruce St. John's **Letter to England**, and a long extract from Earl Lovelace's **The Dragon Can't Dance**. Then there were pieces which portrayed the kinds of response which Caribbean people make to this reality: defiance and revolt in Bob Marley's **Redemption Song** and Martin Carter's **I Come From The Nigger Yard** and **Letter I**; longing for escape into spiritual consolation in Zena Puddy's hymnal songs; grief at suffering in Paul Keens-Douglas's **Coconut** and Frank Collymore's **Ballad Of An Old Woman**; affirmative and positive embracing of innocence as symbolised by the landscape in Kamal Matthews' **Six O'Clock Feeling** and as symbolised by childhood in Marc

Matthews' **Jumbie Picnic**; and a sardonic note decrying ignorance of Caribbean history in Andrew Salkey's **Into History Now**. Mighty Spoiler's **Medley** was a sparkling comment on Caribbean word language dexterity as anarchy against the English language.

Both performers gave all this material passionate interpretation as well as controlled structure. The first came from inspired acting underlined in the case of Marc Matthews by the depth and quality of his experience. His acting history is tied up with the genesis of the **Dem Two** and **Me One** shows which he and Ken Corsbie initiated in Guyana in the 70's. It was a historic moment when Caribbean theatre and literature were united. Much of Caribbean literature owes a debt to its oral roots in creolese but flowered as a phenomenon of printing.

The appearance of the literature on the **Dem Two** and **Me One** stage put it in its proper context. Both Ken Corsbie and Marc Matthews worked hard at these shows, touring the Caribbean and developing their skill at using regional accents which was unprecedented in Caribbean theatre. Through their work, the work of Caribbean writers, the Caribbean language itself, was carried to the people and opened up the possibilities for using it in schools through to university.

I could not help but see **He and She** as the latest stage in the genesis of the first **Dem Two** shows so many years ago. It bore the stamp of innovations of that time, innovations now matured into mastery and control.

So much expense usually goes into creating Caribbean settings of poverty here — a contradiction which usually defeats the performance. A minimal set and imaginative use of space, slides and shadow-acting backed up the performers. Wooden panels used for entrances and exits conveyed movement, passing of time and interiors and exteriors. The effect of having the audience listen to creolese emanate from behind the panels (and the screen) created the sense of overhearing the Caribbean at a great distance. It provided an extra charge of realism. Hillside villages, market scenes, tenement yards, interior domestic scenes, wide open spaces in various hues of natural light and dark, back yards with fruit trees, verandahs and landings — all these unfolded vividly with only the help of an empty crate or two, chairs, and a clothes line which could be taken down or put up as required. Overall, these simple but imaginative techniques framed **He and She** with a sense of space as historical (for focusing the political and social realities) as well as timeless (for expressing emotions and spirit).

A special mention has to be made of Zena Puddy's interpretation of **I Come From the Nigger Yard**. It is usually taken as written for a male voice. Marc Matthews has given a very original musical interpretation to it, turning it into a passionate male/female duet with musical backing. Zena gave a fine woman's solo interpretation of it. Continuing experiments with oral interpretations of Caribbean poetry, prose, plays and calypsoes give endless scope for individual expression.

JANICE SHINEBOURNE

WOODSKIN

by JOY BLAND

With the 500th anniversary of Columbus' making contact with the New World a mere 4 years away, there is a general resurgence of interest in the indigenous peoples and cultures of the Americas. Ms. Bland's WOODSKIN, an illustrated story for children, is a welcome addition to the literature available.

In the book, the focus of the historic contact shifts to the Arawaks and the action which is described is filtered through the perception of two young protagonists, Wakuyando and her brother, Tandie. The author adds the element of reincarnation, suggesting that Wakuyando and Tandie have been reborn in the persons of Yolande and Andy, contemporary Barbadian children, whose story forms the beginning and ending of the book. This is a clever device since it helps to link the story to the present as well as sustain the interest of young readers.

In the course of the narration — a tale of the shock and disbelief experienced by a small Arawak community on first hearing the news and having to come to terms with the coming of Europeans to their island world — many items and customs of aboriginal culture are introduced and described: Wakuyando is named after the red-breast bird, cassava is carried home from the farm in woven backpacks called warishis and later made into cassava bread, Tandie uses a siba to make his first rock painting, and so on.

The author casually introduces the concept of the sexual division of labour which still holds true for surviving indigenous peoples. It is Wakuyando who collects firewood and helps with the cooking and serving of food while her mother goes to the farm and tends the fires that burn all night beneath her family's hammocks. A boy's responsibilities, on the other hand, are less monotonous: Tandie goes on hunting trips with the men, he gets to talk to the stranger who comes to their shores and can learn from him the art of making rock pictures. "Picture making is not for girls", Tandie retorts when his sister offers to help.

The confusion of these first inhabitants when they learn of the marauding expeditions of the Europeans is eloquently mirrored in Yando's reaction to her brother's warning: "But we do not hide from visitors . . . we welcome them and offer them food and drink". The old leader of the village, the cacique Semchedi, correctly predicts that things will never be the same again: "I see trouble . . . I see changes. This is the end of our peaceful life here".

WOODSKIN is a very evocative title for a book of this kind though it is doubtful whether Arawakan tribes ever made these fragile craft. Fashioned from the bark of the purpleheart tree, they are only suitable for travel in calm waters. In Guyana woodskins are only made by the Akawaio tribe of the Upper Maza-

runi area though some will find their way into other native communities as a result of inter-tribe trade. So that when Ms. Bland puts the following words in the mouths of her characters, she seems to be indulging in a bit of poetic licence :

“They must have made boats”, objected Andy. “How would they have got to these islands?”

“Right again,” his father agreed. “They became expert makers of small boats called woodskins. They made them from the bark of tall, straight trees. They also made larger ones sometimes, but knew nothing of engines, and not much about sails.” (p. 4)

That caveat aside, **WOODSKIN** is nicely illustrated and contains many elements that will appeal to youthful readers. In common with many stories for children, it also tells of a journey into the unknown which the children, along with some members of the tribe, will have to embark on in defiance of the cacique, Semchedi, in order to save their lives.

Ms. Bland is to be congratulated for having written a story which manages to be both didactic and enjoyable and in which the first inhabitants of the Caribbean take pride of place.

JANICE FORTE

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN GUYANA **Georgetown, 1982**

by ELMA E. SEYMOUR

In 1947 Elma Seymour resigned from the staff of St. James-the-Less School in Kitty and turned the living room of her home into **The Kindergarten** which she then ran successfully for 15 years. Her account of her experiences as primary school teacher first and then head of her own school as well as the recollections of her own early schooling during the first two decades of this century make her book a charming reading experience. But **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN GUYANA** is not merely anecdotal. Slim though this booklet is, it relates a small but important part of the history of education during a time when private, denominational and government schools co-existed in Guyana.

Elma Seymour's book also chronicles the role played by “coloured Guyanese women teachers and to the nuns, often foreign-born, who devoted years of their lives to the task of educating young minds. There is Sister Teresa of Santa Rosa Mission in the North West District who worked among Amerindian children, the Sisters of Mercy at Carmel R.C. School in Charlestown and Sister Emma and her co-workers who set up and ran the prestigious Convent of the Good Shepherd School in Queenstown. In Mrs. Seymour's words :

It is sad to record that after almost 30 years of successful leadership in the field of primary education the Sisters had to hand over the school to the Government without any word of commendation from them for the work in teaching and the building of standards educationally, spiritually and morally in the lives of the children they served so lovingly and faithfully.

Elma Seymour's book also chronicles the role played "coloured Guyanese young ladies (light skinned people)" in setting up private Kindergartens for upper middle class children in the 1940's. At the same time she names many of their poorer sisters, often "uncertificated", who built up the denominational primary schools which catered to working class children of all races. Elma Seymour also documents the work of Mrs. Josephine Selman-Fraser and the Guyana Voluntary Workers Association :

Mrs. Fraser saw the need, and very often the plight of mothers in the lower income group with children and no one to care for them, so in the interest of helping these mothers, most of them working mothers and very often unmarried, she spear-headed the committee of the Guyana Voluntary Workers, and founded in 1942 the Nursery School attached to the Creche.

Certainly there seemed to exist a strong civic sense, one might even say a moral force, operating in Guyanese society in the post World War II period. Elma Seymour talks of "the advent of Dr. Giglioli", a phrase certainly not too dramatic to describe his impact on the malaria-infested coastlands and interior of Guyana. Elsewhere she describes the Government's Breakfast Centre on St. Philip's Green where hot meals were served to school children for 2 cents daily or free "for those so recommended" by the nuns. Later when she was transferred to St. James-the-Less, Elma Seymour herself was instrumental in organising a similar soup kitchen for malnourished children. Even later at **The Kindergarten**, the one annual feature of her school was to have a Children's Concert to raise funds to help needy children.

The vignettes presented of children from the poorest homes are memorable. In teaching the concept of subtraction, at St. James-the-Less school "... we found that some of the brighter East Indian boys and girls who attended school barefoot, had developed the habits of using their toes as well as their fingers, for arriving at the answers, and this actually gave them an advantage over pupils who wore shoes" or again at this school :

"The children who came from the nearby rural areas, were very often suffering from malaria, especially the East Indians. They brought their lunch to school in saucepans and would eat it at the lunch break, wash their saucepans and await the afternoon session. Sometimes many of these children would be taken with fever and ague and there would be quinine to be administered to them; and they often had only a bare bench and desk to lie on until they felt better to return home. There was no transportation for these children; they had to walk to school and back home again in the afternoon; but because they were early risers they were generally on time for school."

As Elma Seymour feelingly declares two paragraphs later : "It was a blessing for these children when the School's Medical Service came into being

and the school was visited regularly by a team of nurses headed by Dr. C. C. Nicholson, Schools Medical Officer. Their teeth were also examined for cavities and their general health assessed”.

Were this book to be widely read in Guyana, I am sure it would evoke many nostalgic memories from old and young alike. It is a pity that Elma Seymour does not often bother to put in the dates of her own schooling and so on but one can generally work such details out. Again, an insertion of little details would have helped those readers who are not Guyanese and who may not know the distance Father Salmon covered when he rode his bicycle from Plaisance on his inspection visits at the Kitty School.

The dedication and discipline of school marms and masters alike which Elma Seymour describes in this book have all but disappeared from Guyana. So, too, have her charges. Her book closes with a **Directory** of 29 former pupils of the Kindergarten: of these only 6 were resident in Guyana in 1982. The others have joined the Guyanese diaspora. As Elma Seymour says of her charges: “These children are filling today very responsible positions in higher echelons of the Society in the countries in which they find themselves.”

JANICE FORTE

FRIENDS OF KYK-OVER-AL

A great many individuals and organisations have contributed to the successful re-launching of **Kyk-Over-Al**. We owe a special debt of gratitude to the following for their support of this issue of the magazine :

Banks D.I.H.	Authority
Guyana Refrigerators Limited	Shell Antilles and Guianas Limited
Guyana Stores Limited	G.N.C.B.
Bauxite Industry Development Company.	G.N.T.C:
Guyana Rice Milling and Marketing	Friendship Industries
	G.T.M.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The cost of printing and distributing a literary magazine is very heavy. Please help us to keep **Kyk-over-Al** going by sending your annual subscriptions (two issues) to either of the Joint Editors as follows :

A. J. Seymour,
23 North Road,
Bourda,
Georgetown,
Guyana.
Tel. No. 63170

OR

Ian McDonald,
c/o Guysuco,
22, Church Street,
Georgetown,
Guyana.
Tel. No. 67329

In England please apply to :

F. H. Thomasson,
Harrow Farmhouse,
Deeping St. Nicholas,
Lincolnshire PE11 3ET.
Tel. No. (0775 88) 404

Annual subscription rates : G\$40 (including postage), EC\$32 (including postage), £10 (including postage).

The Editors of **Kyk-over-Al** would welcome the submission of poems, short stories, articles and reviews to consider for publication. Publication of course cannot be guaranteed and because of expense it will not be possible to return manuscripts.

