

No. 36

**KYMN-  
OVER-  
AL**

APRIL 1987

- Poetry** Pam Mordecai, McDonald Dash, Mahadai Das, Ian McDonald, Andrew Salkey, A. J. Seymour, John Figueroa, Rooplall Monar.
- Fiction** Tony Kellman, Harold Bascom, Ras Michael Jeune, Sasenarine Persaud
- Articles** The Novels of O. R. Dathorne — Alan McLeod  
Focus on the Caribbean — A. J. Seymour  
Letter from Anguilla — Jan Augustin
- Reviews** of Three Novels by Guyanese Women — Beryl Gilroy, Janice Shinebourne, Grace Nichols; Zinder, Poems by Stewart Brown; Backdam People, Stories by Rooplall Monar; Tales of the Wide Caribbean, by Jean Rhys; Summer Lightning, Stories by Olive Senior; Years of Fighting Exile, Poems by Milton Williams.

+ EDNA MANLEY MOURNED

THE GUYANA PRIZE

820.5

K99

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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.

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APRIL 1987

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## ACROSS THE EDITORS' DESK'

### RESPONSE TO THE "GOLDEN KYK"

Reactions to the "Golden Kyk", our anthology of poems, short stories, and articles from the original series No. 1 (1945) to No. 28 (1961), published in April 1986, have warmed our hearts. More than ever it seems a task which it is valuable to have done. So many people have said that they enjoyed the collection. Many others have said that it is a work that will find an honoured place in their libraries of West Indian literature. Naturally there have been reservations. One reviewer would have preferred the omission of already famous, much anthologised, poems by Martin Carter, Derek Walcott, A. J. Seymour, and Edward Kamau Brathwaite in favour of less well known works. It is a view we respect but consider that a "Golden Kyk" could not afford to exclude some of its most dazzling exhibits, however celebrated.

What has given great satisfaction is the number of young people, many of them aspiring writers themselves, who have said they had no idea until they read the "Golden Kyk" that so much that remains so interesting and so relevant had been written and published in those early days. One of our ideas was to introduce an important part of their cultural heritage to a new generation. And yet perhaps the tributes that pleased us most came from old contributors to the original **Kyk** series. Philip Sherlock was one who wrote a wonderful letter. And we cannot resist quoting from Edna Manley's letter to us :

"You can't imagine what joy I felt with the arrival of **Kyk-Overall** — The **Golden Kyk-Overall** . . . I walk on air — and to see all the names from the past and the new names too — carrying the torch along, and seeing your two names most of all. I am so sad that **Focus** did not survive — you have to be tough to survive — you have indeed survived I have kept it and read it before writing to you. It is very fine, and I get deep pleasure from it. What fascinated one — is the tremendous sense of the **Caribbean** that pours out of me. Oh! well done. Thank you both again and again. God bless."

All in all, the response has been such that we feel even more justified in repeating what was said at the end of the introduction to the "Golden Kyk" selections :

"Some day, when Guyanese or regional institutions can afford it, the whole series of early **Kyks**, 1945 to 1961, should be reissued for the benefit of scholars, for the interest of those who love West Indian literature, and for the pleasure and information of the ordinary reader."

### FACING THE SEA

A New Caribbean Anthology for secondary schools compiled by Anne Walmsley and Nick Caistor. (Heinemann, London — 1986).

One hundred and fifty pages of poems and short stories from 22 countries selected on a ratio two thirds English-speaking and one third translations from

the French, Spanish and Dutch countries, all "facing the sea", in the words of Roberto Retamar of Cuba, "learning one from the other".

There are eight sections such as Young and Free, Them and Us, Outsiders, Coming Through, Love, God and Gods and each corresponds with a CXC Exam theme. There are short forceful bio notes on the sixty-seven men and women authors, some alive, some dead.

**CARIBBEAN POETRY NOW, edited by Stewart Brown, published by Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1985.**

This is an excellent Caribbean anthology. In his Foreward Mervyn Morris gets it absolutely right when he speaks of liking its "range and freshness". There is also a splendid bonus in the beautiful illustrations done by Jennifer Northway. The book is designed to help candidates prepare for the CXC English B Examination. It is arranged in sections whose titles are well-chosen and evocative: "Roots"; "Childhood and Adolescence"; "Folks"; "One Love"; "Home-City Life"; "Home-Country Life"; "Old Folks, Death, and Grief"; "Gods, Ghosts, and Spirits". There are useful Notes and Questions for students. The mixture of poets in the literary tradition and the newer, rawer, oral poets is excellently judged and the range of language styles striking. All the poems — some of them classics of Caribbean poetry like "The Dust"; "Ruins of a Great House"; "University of Hunger"; Roach's "To My Mother", many of them minted in the powerful new forges of Caribbean poetry now — bear "the taste of men's mouths", as Ezra Pound insisted is necessary. If every Caribbean boy or girl could read this book at an impressionable age the love of poetry in our region would be assured.

**THE NEW ISLAND READERS — FIRST BOOK: by Pamela Mordecai, Collins Educational — 1983.**

Pamela Mordecai has produced a fine book of 126 pages for nine-year-olds in the Caribbean. These are thirty-three poems and articles on very interesting topics, of some of what each child should know in history and nature and religion, like old-time Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago, how computers work, and how the Whale got his throat (from Kipling).

Then she tests how well the child has been reading and so she asks questions to test what has been understood and sets down projects on how to learn more.

Many grown ups would be interested also in the land and sea pirates, Jamaican Jonkonnu, the fighting Maroons, Arawaks, Caribs, if you should meet a crocodile, and the nine billion names of God.

**CARIBBEAN JUNIOR ENGLISH 3 AND 4 : by Hayden Richards, Ginn and Company Limited.**

In these two-hundred-page readers, Pamela Modrecai shares editorship with Hayden Richards and Grace Walter Gordon in a special way; the two women writers have carefully revised the original Hayden Richards books and brought them up to date. The table of contents is arranged alphabetically. What

is fascinating is the range and command over words that the books teach the child — the use of twin words, the words that save work, idioms and homophones, the value of alphabetical order in life, how punctuation is used, especially commas, and the selection of opposites. Well illustrated and good value.

**THE CARIBBEAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATION: Volume 10: No. 1, January 1983, and Volume 10 Nos. 2 & 3: April - September 1983, edited by Pamela Mordecai**

How best does a child learn to read? Desmond Clarke in Volume 10 No. 1 points out in a carefully argued article that teachers should emphasise the **learning** of reading and adopt the focus of a pupil since a pupil has to be operative in eight different elements in reading.

In another article, Velma Pollard wrestles with the dilemma of the creole — speaking child in the standard classroom situation. She points out that a thin line divides standard and non-standard forms of language and sometimes even the teachers of different subject areas may be in doubt, so she claims all class-room teachers, whatever the subject, should have their language skills upgraded.

In Volume 10, Nos. 2 and 3, articles deal with the study habits of sixth formers in Jamaica preparing for A Level exams; a sample of 203 sixth formers from 8 high schools was investigated when they had eight weeks to go. Questions included :—

- (1) Making a habit of studying in a quiet place.
- (2) Spending some 15 hours per week on an average.
- (3) The majority worked at a moderate level. The girls were better organised than the boys; they had all been challenged to think by the A-level course.

The article suggests there should be a programme in the first term in sixth form on the whole range of skills, especially concentrating, for example, on planning for study, developing habits, organising material to be learnt, the importance of understanding, improving reading skills and improving thinking and writing skills.

Obviously teachers will gain a great deal from these journals.

In this second issue is an excellent article by a Trinidadian High School teacher, reviewing Louise Bennett's **Selected Poems**, edited by Mervyn Morris and published by Sangster, 1986.

Mrs. Joy Moore captures in ten pages the essential vision of Louise Bennett as a philosopher looking through human behaviour to underlying motives, attacking snobbery and hypocrisy, commenting on morality and the independence of the spirit. She praises the editor for his notes and scholarly presentation.

**ADVANCES IN WORLD ARCHAEOLOGY, VOL : 4 1985 — edited by  
Fred Wendorf and Angela E. Close — Academic Press Inc. — Pub-  
lishers, Harcourt Brace Javanovich.**

In this important book there are six chapters dealing with

- 1) Neolithic Societies in the Near East;
- 2) Relations between Barbarian — Europe and the Aegean civilisation;
- 3) Prehistory of Western Mediterranean Europe;
- 4) Iron Age communities in Southern Africa;
- 5) New Zealand Prehistory; and
- 6) Central Andes Cultivation and Peruvian Prehistory.

The seventh chapter deals with “Petroglyphs in the Prehistory of Northern Amazonia and the Antilles” and is written by Denis Williams of Guyana.

This seventh chapter is a record of human adaptation in contrasting types of environment. Williams explain how the diagrams on rocks vary from semblances of deer, monkeys, snakes, caymans to those of turtles, birds and fish. There are also geometric figures of rings of all types — concentric rings, circles, furrows, diamonds and crosses. There are also drawings which combine the biomorphic with geometric designs.

The 45 pages of text deal with various designs of fish traps — rectangular, spring-basket type and others. Since Williams is an accomplished artist, the text is illustrated with figures and features taken from the pictographs. There is a timehri type, deriving its name from Timehri Rock on the Corentyne River in Suriname and reported by Im Thurn in 1883. This is the most important type of petroglyph in the Antilles, while another significant type is the Aishalton Fish Trap.

In some instances, there are dance costumes that may be the prototype of the Timehri type with rayed lunate headdress, and other costumes used in fertility dances in Colombia with special bodice designs and skirts.

What were the functions of these petroglyphs? Fish trap elements correlate with specialised fishing resources. The Timehri stereotype seems related to masked dance rituals among horticulturalists. The Aishalton type is associated only with enumeration. But Denis Williams points out that the ways in which a given body of elements functioned within a particular adaptive system remain to be examined.

### **150TH ANNIVERSARY OF INDIAN INDENTURE IN GUYANA**

In May 1988, Guyana will mark the 150th Anniversary of the first arrival of indentured Indians into the country. The 150th Anniversary programme will include an important lecture series and a number of cultural activities. It is also hoped to produce an anthology of Indian poetry and prose from Guyana to mark the occasion. Should readers have any suggestions of poems or other writing for possible inclusion in such an anthology the editors would warmly welcome them.

## **THE NEW VOICES : Volume XIV No. 23 — September, 1986**

This 28th issue of **The New Voices** maintains a high standard. There are poems by Andrew Salkey, Krishna Samaroo, Ken Parmasad, James Aboud, Chezia Thompson, Jean Goulbourne, Devonson La Mothe, Glenda Frederick, Steve Gonzalez, and Alex de Verteuil which fill the pages with achievement and promise. There are short stories by Helen Prada, Althea Kaminjolo, and Sase-narine Persaud. Jennifer Rahim has contributed three excellent reviews. There is a fascinating interview with the playwright Mustapha Matura. The Editor's own review of Olive Senior's poems "Talking of Trees" and his editorial notes are not the least stimulating part of the issue. A packed volume, well worth getting.

**The New Voices** in 1987 will have published more issues than any other literary journal in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. It is already the longest lived literary journal in Trinidad and Tobago in terms of years. This is a tenacious, remarkable achievement. The impact, year by year, on the cultural life of the country is incalculable. The preservation of respect and love of poetry and good writing in the land is worth who knows how many cargoes of oil and even a Carnival or two. Anson Gonzalez, the editor and publisher from the beginning, deserves all the congratulations, good wishes, applause and praise one can possibly muster. But most of all, as he himself would certainly agree, he needs active support, not least in the form of donations and subscriptions. Therefore, if any **Kyk** reader can possibly manage it, send subscriptions (TT\$ 15.00 annually) to **The New Voices**, P.O. Box 3254, Diego Martin, Trinidad and Tobago. In 1987 there is to be a double issue of 150 pages so subscriptions now will be especially worthwhile as well as welcome.

### **1987 COMMONWEALTH POETRY PRIZE — A. J. Seymour Appointed Chairman of Caribbean/Canada Regional Panel of Judges.**

A. J. Seymour, joint editor of 'KYK-OVER-AL', has been appointed Chairman of the panel of judges for the Caribbean/Canada Region of the 1987 Commonwealth Poetry Prize. The original Commonwealth Poetry Prize was established in 1972. In 1985 substantial sponsorship by British Airways enabled the PRIZE to grow enormously in scope and reputation. There are now five regional prizes (Canada/Caribbean, Asia, Africa, Australasia and U.K./Europe) as well as the prize for the overall winner and the prize for the best first book of poems. Total prize money is £13,500. In 1986 nearly 500 entries were received altogether which reflects the standing of the Prize as the world's most comprehensive poetry award.

# POETRY

## ALONG THE POTOMAC

Can't sleep, at night, for the flap-and-slap of flags in rhetorical D.C.  
No one's fooled; cloth and canvas can clack imperiously loudly.

Can't live, by day, for the high frizzle of the rice-paper policy of  
weapons-to-come. Too true: so much more will leap out the ground than  
nature intended.

In the afternoon, though, when there is a piston-break between the two  
glooms of national egoism, a smidgin of rest is possible.

**But sleeper, sleep deeply, at your risk!**



### FOR HAITI

In Memory of

**JACQUES STEPHEN ALEXIS**

and

**JACQUES ROUMAIN**

1

We're either cut down, weighted and dumped into the sea  
by the savagery of those licensed uncles of woven straw  
or else we're driven into the ground by their lurking threats;  
from both extremes, the headlamps of blue light terrorise us:  
**tontons-macoutes** parading their acumen, proudly, at home,  
**autol-zobops** cruising, cynically, in sprawls, whatever they fester.

Always being chased by the galloping dread of **Bakalou Baka**,  
we respond, simply, by moving on, while still anchored  
to the long-continuing, inviolable Oath of January  
which even the subverting hurricanes of exile can't silence;  
nor can their prolonged crescendo slacken the stretched skins  
of our Dahomey drums, sworn to the earth like rocks.

2

We come from a harsh land of mountains, buckled by drought,  
a black house of nostalgia for France, a cage of fierce elites,  
but also from a hopeful land of mountains, prevailing **cacos**,  
Peralte and Batravaille, Dessalines over their shoulders,  
Toussaint waving goodbye, wishing us good luck;  
we come from rivers of women, persistence, and Makandal.  
We remember the long infamy of khaki, **la gifle yankee**,  
the **corvee**, the gouging of bayonet to bone, the alien salt,  
the slaughter at Aux Cayes, the landslides of humiliation,

7

and the raking thorn-bush spiralling deep inside us;  
but we understand the reassurance of **assotor** and **acon**,  
along with the contradiction and thrust of the scientific climb.

3

In the mean time, at his desk, in his wedding-cake palace,  
the shepherd of terror is busy devising agony and destitution  
(he's not really worried about his steady bonanza of dollars;  
that's usually mined, promptly, whether asked for or not);  
what's bothering him are all those who got away:  
the angry dispossessed, the dreaming maimed, and the dead.

**Veve** flour on his hands, self-promoting designs on his scratch-pad,  
he straddles a ceremonial world of murder and endless delight  
in notching the lives of the poor with more and more torment and neglect;  
he rules by Papa-echo, midnight-decrees, slice, and bullet.  
Yet, he's fretful of the open sea and the remembered dead.  
The truth is, Jacques, the man's menaced by the logic of water and mountains.

ANDREW SALKEY

NOTES

- Jacques Stephen Alexis** — Novelist, essayist and originator of the theory of Marvellous Realism in Haitian history and culture. Murdered by the Francois Duvalier dictatorship in 1961.
- Jacques Roumain** — Poet, novelist, one of the founding editors of **La Revue Indigene**, the magazine of the influential Indigenist Movement (of the late Twenties and early Thirties), and founder of the Communist Party of Haiti in 1934. Died in 1944.
- Tontons-Macoutes** — Francois Duvalier's dreaded political police forces.
- Auto-Zobops** — Members of a secret society of sorcerers who drive around in cars with headlamps that project sinister blue beams of light.
- Bakalou Baka** — A ferocious spirit in animal form who serves a society of sorcerers.
- Oath of January** — Oath sworn by victorious army of slaves, on January 1st 1804, in proclaiming the independence of the French colony of Saint-Domingue (Haiti, Land of Mountains): "Live free or die

... we swear never to yield before any power on earth!"

- Cacos** — Armed peasants who resisted the U.S. Occupation of Haiti (1915-1934) and in particular, the forced labour law.
- Makandal** — Legendary 18th century maroon revolutionary chieftain.
- La gifle yankee** -- Haitian expression for "the yankee slap in the face" during the Occupation.
- Corvee** — Forced peasant labour under the supervision of U.S. marines.
- Assotor and Acon** — Ritual drum and sacred rattle.
- Veve** — Ritualistic symbols of astral forces drawn in flour or corn meal.

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## I WANT THIS DAY TO FINISH QUICKLY

I want this day to finish quickly;  
for tomorrow to seize me by the throat:  
for if it does not, today will hang me  
from the tree in the sunset behind the hill.

With this bitter root I have taken,  
the sunset sinks in the morning,  
and the sun rises at midnight  
when I am asleep. Winter seizes  
me while the trees of summer  
are abundantly green.

My eyes are autumnal. Yellowing  
leaves drop to the ground even as  
blazing Greek chariots bearing the sun,  
with all his golden horsemen, ride across  
the roof of the world.

I knock on your door at midnight,  
and when you come, it is only air  
which greets you. I constantly sing  
my songs for you, but you cannot hear  
them. I write on the page and the ink  
is invisible.

I take my confessions to every temple  
that I know, but the gods do not listen.  
They watch my anxious face with stony eyes.

Not a gesture will they make.  
I have walked up the aisle to every high altar,  
knelt at the feet of every god carved in stone  
or marble, hung a rosary in adoration, as is often  
requested, poured libations upon their feet of clay,  
turned incense round their fixed heads, touched holy  
fires to my forehead as instructed; and still, either  
I am dumb in spite of these words, or I do not under-  
estimate them. Their lips can only be broken  
with a hammer.

Were I to hang from the world upside down like a spider,  
so that my eyes stood at my feet,  
and my toes twiggled in moist clouds; and then,  
were I to imagine that in the universal disorder  
of things, only I was in position, I would still change  
my order, or I would be changed, involuntarily.

So when you come to me from the roof,  
climbing through my multiple windows,  
parachuting into my bed at midnight  
like a trained soldier or high adventurer;  
when you leave me before you have come,  
and you arrive after you have left,  
I am unperturbed.  
Instead, I marvel at your consistency,  
and I wonder that the rest of the world  
is easily deceived, or undeceiving.

MAHADAI DAS

---

## INVADER

The fall of snow we cannot hear  
the flow of fear we cannot see

engulf and mystify the sere  
marrow of ancient bones that creak.

And through the stretching flesh  
the searching waves, uncertain, seek

the contours of a willing beach  
to welcome and protect a mesh

of whisperings and rounding ways.

A warm blush lights the prow,  
and tinted waves in shaded creeks

(the storms as yet unknown) caress  
a brazen bare canoe, silent as snow

certain of what it seeks.



## I WALKED THE GARDEN

I walked the garden vaguely  
distracted by the wild outside

not seeing that roses sagely  
sing of the present's pride.

I thought too much of olden times,  
perhaps, but how could I not miss  
the missing — silent echoed chimes  
bruising the bower from the far abyss?

JOHN FIGUEROA

---

## FAR JOURNEY TO PARIKA

Engagement of gears, co-ordinating  
accompanied by pale whiff, Estee Lauder's  
concoction, arresting, yet caressing passion  
Underway into the far voyage  
Striking out like Odin, in a long ship  
Passing through Saffron Street's Sunday-squalor  
by market-goers with bargain-eyes (for squash?)

City recedes, highway beckons uneven, harassing  
Marina's shocks, soon  
The Bridge, umbilical, uneasy  
Take it slow like aneophyte skater  
boogieing on polythene wheels  
until safety comes on the other side.

Into the sweet sugar lands, then  
After Versailles, Vreed-en-hoop's turn  
looks awake on this somnolent  
Sabbath, translating through  
Nouvelle Flanders sad French memory;  
L'Union, Rotterdam, careless Harlem,  
Waller's Delight, once Optimism's twin.

Passing graveyard of rotting metal  
at Crane, trunking through greensleeves  
of wide paddies; Windsor Forest, blank Blankenburg,  
Come to huge gabled ruin at

Fellowship, sitting in octogenarian  
 crutched silence, waiting to be haunted  
 Coconut palms prevail, behind  
 ocean's wall and swell  
 Hustling through Den Amstel, Hague, dwelling  
 by Cornelia Ida, yellow rose empastured,  
 And another — Anna Catherina : bustles, broad brocade,  
 Edinburgh — reflections of the high road,  
 Dead slow over dying puntbridge  
 Leonora's oakbarrel images, skipping  
 through Stewartville, fleeting past  
 the undutchedness of Uitvlugt, dull, unbelching  
 over the canebrake  
 Old women—country feet in boutique-shoes  
 hurrying to genuflect, to be sermonised by  
 bearded young pastor-chaps in absurd  
 cassocky vestments under eaves; quaint  
 yester-century worship-places still affecting  
 slave balconies  
 Zeeburg, de Willem, Meten-meer-Zorg dreaming dykes and  
 inundations; DeKinderen, village of children,  
 Tuschen de Vrienden's old railway siding!  
 Eradicated young gaffers squandering  
 recent memories. Vergenoegen, Philadelphia  
 now englishfying Bahwell? Grenitch Park —  
 Over Boerasirie's bound, seeing  
 children tottering on walkbridge (enough  
 for one and a half)  
 Over the milk-green trench, suggestions  
 of suffocation under weed, Victoria Regia  
 clotted in some impromptu formality  
 Jandhi pennons by unpainted dwelling,  
 gambolling calves, giant red combines relaxing,  
 indolent; Datsun taxis shuttling  
 Everpresent Essequibo showers, humidifying  
 human cargoes  
 Orangestein, peculiarly. For loads  
 of suckers, plantained,  
 Pass on by schoolhouse abandoned, name's  
 obliteration amateurish Bush ---- -k----ol  
 (prepping for democratic regionalism?)  
 Ah, Hydroni . . . waterthoughts undoubtedly  
 Unceremoniously into Parika, foetal, patient,  
 pulping, with urban blight  
 eighty-dollar Shirts, North Star track shoes,  
 baseball caps invested with insignia,  
 Slips, ungainly underclothing,

Haberdashery various, colourfully violent

Across the road tracking tractormud  
incongruous 'Parlment'

The Atmosphere — bibulous place,  
watering hole, where rurals discuss  
the hard stuff, from sophisticated flagons

Stelling point away to distant

Leguan sitting hopeful with

bouncy rice-fed whores just an anchor's throw  
away elusive

But midst and twixt the

imported sophistication

Three friendly sugar apples!

She had never ever experienced this succulence

How, how are they — consumed (perhaps eaten)?

Return then traveller, to saner sanctuary!

Mints, eggs hardboiled, I-cee punches

chow-mein-under-glass, the whispered  
price in fly-blown generosity . . .

Eight dollarsssssss

The lady pendulous, unblinking,

unblackmarket eyes, a consideration sibilantly

The mints triumph before the far journey past

Kyrl's house opens

Parika, Parika . . . were you

the game's destiny . . . ?

or was the

silent soporous companionship?

McDONALD DASH

---

## NO GREENER GRASS

Can I accustom my eyes  
to this drought of trees and flowers?  
to decrepit grey-haired woman  
stained with scorpian stings?  
toes eaten by maggots?

The redbrick road  
stampeded  
its contours creased,  
Jagged and potmark'd  
like a woman's belly . . .

the thighs imaged a continuous scream?  
And look the lone fisherman  
his net charting  
bulwarking rooted, festering growth  
his visage enveloped a million stars  
hope is smothered in the breast  
as dawn becomes an apparition  
emptiness reclaims his daylight monotony

blackbirds hooted  
carrions gathered, poised  
strategically for the expanse  
this pasturage  
where humans and animals,  
indistinguished  
like vines and undergrowth  
mapping  
stifling the children's footsteps

the star elusive but shining

Can my eyes accustom  
to this barrack of immobility  
its crumbling, roach-infested walls  
stained with my grandfathers  
groping, tottering footsteps?

the throat scorched the eyes delirium?

This road is still horizonless  
bees and ants swarmed its edges  
populating its potholes  
men and animals have lost the oasis

Can my eyes accustom  
to this inter-action of events and situations  
chains of faeces and morsels dotting  
this pasturage?

No greener grass to rekindle hope.

Can my eyes understand this discourse  
this destiny  
the redbrick road  
jagged and potmark'd  
curving like a woman's belly?  
the elusive star?

No greener grass to rekindle hope.

ROOPLALL MONAR

## EVENSONG

Black bodies punctuating  
long chill dusks, their limp  
heads strung, a cruel umbilical  
to lordly trees.

And now this body  
swinging on this tree  
a fragile line  
creasing the crimson air.

My Granny say  
she going die in that swing;  
my Granny say  
she feel like birds and angels —  
she say it tie her  
to the evening.



## DOG'S OTHER FACE

The morning is lying content  
like a baby, its soporific eyes  
wide at the sky, oblivious  
of butterflies, light-footed nanas  
tending to pollen, fixing up fruit  
sexlessly building new worlds.

I suppose these green islands  
have been idyllic from the start  
Los Huevos delighting his Arawak eyes  
the Venezuelan mountains  
hulking in mists across the Boca  
making his mouth run.

I have been reading — C S Lewis  
and Sylvia Plath : her lifescape  
dry and clear and cold : his vision  
imprecise and far away, extravagantly  
seminally warm. To be unsexed  
like Macbeth's chick, milk  
pitchers empty, dead perfect  
is not my thing. Reality  
is percept too, and all perception dim.

Best to be wanton, then, unbound  
by what supposes to be there;  
when this land growls and runs at me

six point one on the Richter Scale  
I know there's nothing firm — see  
the worm turns — dog's other face  
is God.

PAMELA MORDECAI

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## REPORT

Thus now my seventy-third step to heaven.

For more than fifty years, imagination  
Raiding the inarticulate to brood on word  
At the edge of image, mood and memory  
From realms beyond Time, laid in Eternity

Bringing new concepts to the mind of man  
For which the Lord be praised;

telling the children  
Names of the giants of the past who toiled,  
Mightily wrought to make Guyana great.

Poems have married with my name —

A dream of history

In the black moving waters of our rivers,  
Name-fingers reaching in from far off lands  
To teach new syllables upon the map,  
A tribal prophet triumphs in his sacrifice,  
Tomorrow's gold for children, women, men  
To baffle speech — these must the children

know,

And for all this may the Great Lord be

praised.

A. J. SEYMOUR

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## RAIN

No rain for months, sky hard blue,  
The ground hardening like iron,  
Earth hot to shod feet even,  
Smoke-shawls from the bush-fires .  
Sun glares red before night falls.  
White is the worst colour : bright as bone.  
Time soon coming when the oxen starve :  
Grass turns to ash in such weather,  
The savannahs send up clouds of burning dust.

Green is a colour gentle and forgotten  
Like blood gone forever from a dead face.  
Mud cracks in pools once sweet with lilies.

Old men, who have measured life,  
Known the hard seasons, say  
Water would be the best gift  
If it could be wrapped.

And so it comes, a fundamental beauty :  
A simple thing not often counted.  
Like love, when it's there life balances :  
We do not feel the balancing.  
Departure leaves us husked and dry,  
It comes again and steadies us :  
soothing, far away, a noise in the clouds,  
A summoning freshness in everything.  
An arid heartland springs alive.  
Water is love : it clears and shines :  
Clemency for a wracked land

IAN McDONALD

## FICTION

### A MAN IN LOVE

by TONY KELLMAN

The woman on the other end of the line said that Patricia was not at home, that she no longer lived there, that in fact, she had got married. Vincent's eargates slammed shut in a shock-response to this news item. Patricia, married! How on earth could this be possible? When? To whom?

He wasn't even aware he hung up the phone. His mind had returned to the weeks leading up to this moment. Now he realised why she had been avoiding him and not returning his phone calls. He had thought her distance was the result of her need to be alone. Every man and woman sometimes needed time to themselves. After all, she was unemployed with two young children whose father she said she couldn't get along with. She had needed time alone. Now it seemed, too much time had elapsed, time he now knew had been spent in securing confetti, bells, priest, cake. Time from which his image was torn.

His love for her was as deep as the pain he now felt. It ran like blood through every tunnelling ancestral vein, taking him back to its childhood origins; to the time of running around their district's four connecting roads aptly called "The Square", to her slim body wrapped in spotless carefully pressed white and blue school uniform. Body gliding smooth as an angel's over the hill by Miss Browne's shop.

At school that day her image would possess all his waking dreams and he would be frantic for evening to come when he and his friends would assemble under the streetlight to watch the girls play hop-scotch. Once, Vincent summoned enough courage to approach her just as she was finishing her game.

"Close your eyes and I will tell you something," he said. He had nothing to tell her really. He had wanted to kiss those maddening lips. But his courage failed and he managed only to touch her cheek lightly with the tips of his fingers. Velvet cheek. Face serene as an angel's. She opened her eyes slowly, smiling bravely up at him. Then she was off dancing in the air towards her home leaving his heart to race alone. Would she remember this incident now, that was to make him dream of her each night until he was nearly twenty-one years?

He had written of her constantly in his school diaries. He called her Valeria. His mother couldn't speak foreign languages and his father was too busy to be interested in diaries. His brothers who knew foreign languages would not know who Valeria was. Elle s'appelle Valeria. Mon amour. Je t'aime Valeria. Yo amo Valeria. Everywhere in his diaries. Valeria. Valeria. Valeria. No-one but him would know, no-one but him had access to this heaven.

When they met again many years later, Patricia was so sweet and as beautiful as ever. Vincent thought it rather profound and significant that it was only after they had met again as adults and started seeing each other that his nocturnal dreams stopped. He felt that her actual physical presence had put flesh on to those comforting dreams. And this made his joy complete.

Even though she told him she had two children now his feelings for her did not change at all. He was waiting for the right moment to tell her how much he admired and adored her. When the news of her marriage came Vincent realised he had waited too long.

Utterly devastated, he struggled to extricate himself from the bondage of love, struggled to explain to himself the meaning of it all. It was not until he himself got married that his heart felt any relief, until the day he saw her coming from the beach and gave her a lift in his car.

All his latent love rose like incense in his soul, wing-thrilling.

"I'm single again," she said breaking his silence. "The marriage only lasted a few months." Vincent had difficulty in responding. Then he said, "And I'm married now." His voice was filled with joy and sadness. More sadness than joy. Why did life have to be like this, he thought? When I was free there she was loving and hating her children's father. Enough to marry him. Perhaps she felt I wasn't ready or willing to commit myself to her and hence her children as well. Maybe she simply didn't love me in the same way I loved her. She would marry the children's father. He will have to support them then. It will make life easier for her. Things would be easier.

Vincent pondered for minutes/centuries on the paradoxes and complexities of the human psyche, the unfathomable, unpredictable nature of human emotion. When he dropped her off by the Road of Blackrocks he discovered that he had hardly spoken. Was Sparrow correct when he sang "The one that you love never marry to she/It' the one who love you, she will make you happy"? Or was happiness the traditional sharing of equal quantities of love? What really was love? Was it dreaming of someone from childhood to one's twenty-first birthday? Was it a touch on a velvet cheek under a streetlight? And did it receive its beginning and its end there? Was striving for completeness — flesh on dream/tangible dream/love-making — unnecessary after all? Did this all-embracing aspiration change or rob the definition of love? Was fulfilment to be found in spirit woman, flesh woman, both, none at all?

"Damn!" Vincent shouted to himself in the car three months later. "Why won't she call, Why won't she tell me how she really feels (if she feels anything now at all) and so relieve me, relieve me from this undying love!"

All at once Vincent became the conscious measure of two selves wedded in vastly different ways to wife-love and Valeria-love. This inner/outer division as much as it was intensely illuminating, broke his concentration for a brief moment, a moment in which he found himself floating through a sea of joy and suffering. Wife-love was there and flourishing, but Valeria-love was a big suffering. She, from fear of involvement, fear of hurt; he, from bubbling unsatisfied longing. The tides of torture kept pulling them apart though they tried in vain to reach, to touch each other.

The last Vincent remembered was the blue face of a wave marked "To Zion Hill" towering above him and the clanging of colliding metal.

## "MORNING CHIEF"

by RAS MICHAEL JEUNE

Morning Chief. Yes Chief dis is my garden. You from where? The Mayor's Office. No sorry chief but I don't even know the Mayor, I only hear he voice pon the radio; he did say "keep on farming". Wha' is duh chief? My parapet garden den dat I does wuk so hard on. Dis garden the Mayor want fuh tek an' mek a avenue? Well wid all respects to you chief an' to the Mayor chief, but even if he was a stallion or dem wild cow dat does come from Kitty an' destroy all meh bora an' calaloo plants, I won't stop farming hey Chief, avenue or no avenue. Permission? Yuh talking 'bout permission well leh a tell yuh chief. First I get permission from the guard at the President gate to enter den I get permission from the Secretary to see the President Public Relations Officer, den I get permission from he to go to a Agriculture course at the Mon Repos School. After dat I get cutlass an' fork from the President chief. So yuh see wid all due respects I done get permission: So what, Chief, the Mayor gon still build a avenue 'pon me farm? Oh I see it was a plan mek a long time ago. So why yuh stop dem? Yuh give me advice? Well I don't really need dat. What I need is foh you to help meh wid all dem wild cow wha' does come from Kitty an' destroy dese crops. Pound dem! What you mean pound dem? You could imagine me an' twenty cow! Wild cow from Kitty, Chief, not sey is Albouystown cow or Campbelville cow but Kitty cow chief! Kitty cow dread chief! You could imagine me an' twenty Kitty cow gieing through Georgetown to the pound 'pon a bright sunny day wid traffic all over the place. Not me chief. What was dat? Tie dem? Ah dont have rope chief. Ah guess I will jus' have to keep on pelting dem wid bricks. No, nothing wrong wid dat except last week ah nearly bus' a lil boy head an' Monday gone a put a dent in dat van over dere. Is a good ting the owner wasn't nearby to see. Anyhow maybe yuh could help me wid meh water problem chief. Yes I does got to fetch water from the yard till so. Yuh can't help me wid dat? Why? Currency! I gone pay foh the pipe chief. Oh foreign currency! Well in dat case I gon jus' humble an' wait pon the rain because the way America behaving we more likely to become a foreign country dan get foreign currency.

# MY MOTHER WAS A SPLENDID TEACHER

by SASENARINE PERSAUD

I remember the nights when we would sit around the fireside waiting on him. It was agonising for her and we boys always felt her hurting, her worrying that something had happened to him. I used to be angry with her for hurting so much for him, but when I looked at her my anger always evaporated. She was so beautiful, so indescribably beautiful. Gradually all of us started to wait like her and hurt like her. These were the nights when he would drink and come home drunk. He knew it hurt her and he did it. I hated him for it. Sometimes he hit her too in their room. We used to wait downstairs — and I used to want to kill him, for hitting her. I never knew for certain that he hit her but I felt that he did. I had vowed that I would never hit my wife or take alcohol, or smoke.

But there were good times too — the times he came home early and was sober and was making something or helping her. We, strangely enough, were always with him. We helped him pass the saw, or nails, or hammer or chisel, or heap the grass, or burn the grass or plant. When he read we were all over him fighting for his attention and affection — competing even with her. When he helped her cooking or decorating we were all over both of them — and they were happy, both of them. We felt it and we were happy too! Life was so beautiful! Then we never knew how beautiful it was until he started drinking again.

At first he would drink about once every two weeks, then he started drinking every week, every Saturday. Every Saturday night there were quarrels.

He slept late and did not join us Sunday mornings for puja — and I felt her hurting, crying inside — but she prayed and sang so deeply, so earnestly that we were touched and like her felt that there would be some end to it all — that all would be well. Then every morning he bullied us in to telling them 'Ram-Ram'. She always used to teach us to say 'Ram Ram' to both of them, and to him first when we got up in the morning and would gently remind us if we forgot. We liked it then, but when he started telling us to say it we hated it. It seemed though he was shoving her out, pushing her out, encroaching on her duties, on her life and we rebelled. One morning I refused to tell him 'Ram Ram' and he beat me badly and I still did not tell him or her 'Ram Ram'.

She had tried to save me and he had pushed her away. He beat me and beat me with his broad belt and I just stood there thinking 'One day when I get big you'll pay for this'. He beat me until he was exhausted. He looked foolish and frustrated when he was finished. All she said was, "Paul, you cannot force him, if he or the other do it because we force them it makes no sense. Can't you see they must do it with joy and sincerity . . ." her voice was so tender and loving when she spoke to him that I felt angry with her. How could she be so tender with him when he had chucked her.

On Sundays too when she fasted and abstained from meat he would insist that she cooked beef; Beef which we Hindus abstained from he demanded. And she cooked it silently, almost lovingly for him and he enjoyed it. I always wanted her to rebel, to refuse to cook it. I always hoped that she would. I wanted to support her, to tell her I would stand by her, small as I was, if she refused to cook it. But she cooked it. I could not understand it and I got angry with her and when he offered it to me, I ate it too. I knew I shouldn't. I knew that she did not like us doing it, but she said nothing, she was not even angry. I always wanted to cry in my frustration when this happened. I wanted her to say, "You shouldn't" and I would have stopped but she said nothing. He enjoyed it and I hated them both, he was enjoying it and she was not bothered, as though nothing wrong had happened yet I felt he was wrong and that I was too, for part-taking with him.

When they had died in an accident because he was drunk I hated him. I did not mind his death as much as hers. If he had died at another time I would have been able to find sympathy for him.

For ten years I drifted without identity and then they came back. I had forgotten that somewhere there was some all-pervading force controlling our lives and which was more powerful than all of us. I dug up books on Hinduism, on the Vedas, on the Upanishads, on the Puranas, on Indian mythology and History. I learnt classical Indian music. I became involved in cultural work among the westernised and semi-assimilated youths and I married. For years I have lived without a childhood. I have grown accustomed to motherlessness and fatherlessness.

One day perhaps I'll be my own father and my wife a mother. She's a good wife and lover. She enjoys parties and social functions. It is difficult to get her in the temple. She looks very very attractive when she dresses in her very tight trousers and close fitting jerseys and low cut frocks. Her nails, her face are so colourful, her life is so colourful.

Only this morning we quarrelled. She fried eggs for breakfast and cooked minced beef for herself.

I remember my childhood and my mother. She was splendid.

Excerpt from "THE BEER DRINKERS"

A NOVEL by HAROLD A. BASCOM

TERRENCE

Terrence August climbed out of his reconditioned Honda Accord and sighed. (Saturday night in upper Durban Street bustled about him. A few metres away a group of bread sellers, whom he judged sinister looking, murmured under a lamp post). He had just dropped off the last of 'the boys', now he was before his own 'gates' — his own house that had ceased to be a home since Pamela went away one week ago with the twins. She would come back in her own time, he told himself as he released the chained lock and gently pushed the gate open wide. A short clay brick driveway bordered by thriving ferns led in to a neat two-bedroomed house painted in light green. Its French window which ushered one onto a little verandah with a portico, stood out. Many who were drawn to look at the house that August built thought it was beautiful. Who knew that for the man himself it had, for the last six days or so, become as a tomb?

Pamela . . .

Terrence thought she had made a mess of what they had going for their marriage. What was it that suddenly caused her to be so rebelliously pious? (The Lord indeed moved in mysterious ways . . .) Pamela had gone to a crusade one Tuesday night and afterwards she had been apparently ensnared by the power of the blood. Terrence had wondered if the evangelist having been a Black American was the cause. He remembered Vincent telling him of the Black American production manager who was at the State Printery for three months and who, even before the short stint was over, could have bragged that he had run through the majority of the women — unmarried and married — in the bindery. Vincent had ended acridly: "An accent is all a man needs to screw a Guyanese woman!" Terrence had protested though he had been troubled about shades of truth in Vincent's outburst. So the evangelical crusade had begun and he had remembered it . . . remembered the outburst the duration of the crusade at which Pamela had been present every night; and while she had prayed and sang under the magnificent tent, he prayed for the tent's folding and the evangelist's departure for neighbouring Suriname.

But when the tent folded and the Evangelist left, a part of Terrence's life folded too. Pamela, singing 'The things I used to do I do them no more', ceased to accompany her husband to the cinema — to shows — to boxing at the Sports Hall which he had thought they both enjoyed. And when the Agency manager got remarried Terrence had no choice but go to the reception ball without his spouse whom, as social conventions went, had been expected. (He had pleaded — begged — promised that she would not have had to dance nor drink strong drink and that even if they had to dance she wouldn't be expected to wind. No persuasion moved her however). So he had gone alone and as if to hurt the all-seeing heart of her Lord, imbibed heavily, got drunk, and carried on most wantonly with willing Noelle the cashier.

Pam didn't talk to him that entire week until he had said that he was sorry and went to church the following Sunday to be so bored, he felt drilled to the core where a deeper and dark frustration ran. He had returned home that day a very morose man and had sat before his four-speaker stereo. He selected the most suggestive Sparrows in the rack and had spun them as if for life.

That night he went to bed to face Pamela's back and tantalising backside and she resisted his every attempt to conjugate. It had been the beginning of a pattern which he felt would do them no good as man and wife, and decided that he would have a matured talk with her. He had been confident that he would have brought her to her senses. Wasn't he a best selling underwriter in the Agency? Photograph in the Newspapers as testimony and all that? He decided that he was going to have a 'good book' talk with Pamela since he was, by no means, a heathen. The next day, then, after breakfast, he told her that he wished to speak to her. The rain was falling and their two girls, still in pyjamas, were counting umbrellas out on Durban Street. "Man, Pam . . ." he began softly. "If you keep up with this every-night church thing we could break up, you know . . ."

She shrugged lightly. "Well, if the Lord wants it so —". She shrugged again and dashed Terrence's cool to the floor. But it did not shatter — only cracked badly down the centre. He managed to hold it together. "You don't know about God, girl . . ." he said suppressing an urge to shout. "But I know!" Lips set meanly, eyes filled with anger. "I wasn't dragged up! I didn't discover God only yesterday! MY SISTER WAS A PASTOR — TWO CHURCHES!" He let go of his cool. It fell apart: "MY MOTHER WAS PIOUS! — SANG HYMNS MORNING NOON AND NIGHT! But only those nights when my father was in the gold bush! When he was out my mother's nights were for my father! She was a woman! My sister . . . she had a marriage bed too!" Then he shook his head, lips twisted in scorn: "You think the women in my family were Jenny asses? Suddenly you don't care to be a woman in my bed. I'M TIRED OF SEEING YOUR BLOODY BACK! I'M TIRED OF YOUR UNRESPONSIVENESS! OH SHIT! SUDDENLY KISSING IS SLOPPY! YOU DON'T GO ANYWHERE WITH ME ANYMORE!" Then his voice dropped: "It's not what goeth in that corrupts, woman! — It is what comes out!" He spun and fixed the plaster plaque proclaiming Christ the head of the house and the rest of it and demanded: "WHO'S THE HEAD OF THIS BLASTED HOUSE?"

"CHRIST!" Pamela August spat. Terrence was up. He snatched the plaque from the wall, rushed out to the verandah, and hurled it away. It sailed like a frisbee, struck a cable post with a bent bus stop sign, and fell to pieces to the stagnant-watered trench that ran past the gate. "I AM THE HEAD OF THIS BLOODY HOUSE! I'S FEED AN' CLOTHE YOU AND THEM TWO CHILDREN! FROM TODAY ALL THIS JESUS NONSENSE FINISH IN HERE! IF YOU DON'T BLOODY KNOW THE BLOODY BIBLE — I'LL TEACH YOU: YOU GOTTO CLING TO ME, AND I GOT TO CLING TO GAWD! — DAMN-IT-TO-HELL!"

"Man, Mr. August, it ent soundin' good!" (It was Mrs. Richmond—Sister Richmond as he would respectfully call her). The woman turned to Pamela on

the brink of tears. "Pam . . . Yo' husban' ent wrong! Yo' cyant put church in frontuh 'e . . ." Then to Terrence: "But she young, yo' know, Brother August — What you should do is talk to she pastor!"

"Talking about that? I think I should really talk to that bitch!"

"Yes — do dat, but he ent a bitch . . ."

Terrence began buttoning up his shirtjac and his hands trembled. "Hear, Sister Richmond, ah sorry about calling you' all pastor a bitch! But you don't know how this whole thing got me worked up! I MARRY PAM IN A CHURCH — THE CHURCH JOIN WE TOGETHER IN HOLY MATRIMONY AND NOW IS LIKE A CHURCH GON TEAR WE ASUNDER!"

"Brother August — talk to the Pastor . . ."

"But again . . . why I should talk to he? IF HE KEEP SEEIN' MY WIFE IN THE CHURCH EVERY BLOODY NIGHT WITHOUT ME, YOU DON'T THINK HE SHOULD REALIZE THAT SOMETHING GOT TO BE WRONG WITH ME AND MY WIFE?" Terrence nodded. "I ent got no talk to talk with he — BUT WAIT . . . AH . . . MINUTE . . ." He turned and frowned at his sulking wife. ". . . Is not this afternoon he slinks in here to pray with you?" Pamela sucked her teeth. "TO HELP ME GAWD!" exploded Terrence, AH GON WRING HE BLASTED NECK JUS' HE PUSH IT THROUGH THAT DOOR!"

"Mistah August what wrang with you? eh? WHAT REALLY WRANG WITH YOU MISTAH AUGUST?"

Then Pamela began to cry. Then the twins began to cry. And that afternoon when he came home bent on making peace, Pamela and the children were gone.

Terrence drove into the yard. His headlamps lit up the old Morris 1300 by the cesspit tank at the back of the house. He parked, came out and pushed in the gate. Lower down the street a dub station boomed roundly. He turned away and was soon climbing his front stair. He opened the door and went in without switching on the lights. He was hungry, so fished a half bag of tennis rolls from a large refrigerator. He sat in a single-seater Morris chair, threw a leg over one of its arms, and bit into a cold, dry roll in the gloom. He missed his wife. But the thought of her expecting him to go and beg her to come back riled him. He told himself that he was unlike other men — that he was strong enough not to be manipulated by a bloody woman! Over six days she was gone . . . six days . . . But suppose . . . let us suppose, he thought, I go and bring Pamela back . . . would it mean she'd be a different wife? Maybe . . .

Pamela, naked, filled him. A monumental yearning stirred down to his crotch. He caressed the rising there and thought of onanism.

"No!" he whispered harshly. He refused to masturbate. He was a married man! Tomorrow, Sunday, he was going for his wife. Maybe then he'd

be able to pick up on his writing. Since Pamela left he had not written a line. This was another thing which disturbed him. He sighed. Yes . . . he was going to bring his wife back home. A woman should not be away too long from her husband . . . And Terrence was thinking of Mrs. Griffith. The story moved him. Couldn't he write a poem on a story like that? He got up and switched on the lights. The clock in the form of a ship's helm said it was approaching eight forty-five. He walked over to the French window, slid it open, and stood on t' e verandah. He was still hungry . . . wanted food in his stomach. Wanted food on top of all that beer he had been consuming since ten that morning. He opened his shirt and felt the cold city night upon his wiry frame. He wished food could appear on his table. He had to admit to himself that he missed Pamela much for her cooking, too. There was meat in the freezer. There was corned beef too. (Thanks to Milton who made sure that once he was on ship clearing duties and he got 'stuff', he never forgot his beer drinking friends). There were many things to cook — but no cook.

He was looking over the empty weed-filled lot to Sister Richmond's house; but it was only when a hand waved from the kitchen window that he became acutely conscious of it. It was Gweneth's hand and Gweneth was Sister Richmond's twenty-eight-year-old unmarried daughter whom the Lodge boys said hoped to find a man in the church but didn't 'score' yet. She came out on the back verandah and hailed over to him: "GOOD NIGHT BROTHER AUGUST! HOW'S EVERYTHING?" Terrence made a gesture of helplessness and patted his tummy. The girl laughed (though he could not have heard her) and went back inside. Terrence yawned and turned in too. He thought of going to bed but vetoed it. He was not sleepy. He was hungry — SHIT! He sat and looked at his writing desk with attache case and portable typewriter. He got up, went to the fridge, took out the tin of corned beef. He was going to eat it uncooked and cold then he would try to write. Just then he heard footsteps up the front stairs followed by Gweneth's calling voice. Taken back, he wondered what it was that she wanted?

He opened the door. She was smiling: spaced incisors. He looked upon her, measuring her, weighing her allure. There was nothing wrong with Gweneth other than gauntness of face, which, maybe, was due to her be-manless. Every other part of her seemed right — ample.

"Ah didn' understan' what you mean by this —" She repeated the gestures he had made on the verandah. He laughed.

"What you thought I meant?"

"Dat you' hungry?"

"Cook for me?"

"Yo' foot short, Brother August . . ."

"No-no — I have things to cook — look . . . corn beef. I was going to open it and eat it just like this."

Gweneth crossed the threshold. "You wan me to cook something foh you?"

"Why not — once your mother don't mind . . ."

"She ent home. Is jus' me and Granpa — an' he sleepin'. Mommy gone to church outin'. She ent comin' back til aroun' eleven."

So while Gweneth cooked corned beef and rice, Terrence typed and finally produced the first stanza of what he titled : SONG FOR MRS. GRIF-FITH . . .

Sing the blues  
for wounded hearts  
forever to be scarred  
by a ghostly scythe  
in the lonely sky  
sing the blues . . .

And by the time the finished meal was announced he was re-reading the poem's last stanza . . .

Oh sing the blues  
Sing the blues  
Sing the blues  
Sing the blues for wounded hearts  
Forever to be scarred by a ghostly scythe  
Oh sing the blues  
Of a lonely wife  
Sad in the wake  
Of a husband long gone . . .  
Sing the blues . . .

As he ate, praising Gweneth's cooking hand, she sat before the typewriter. "I nevu type before, yo' know . . ." He couldn't help noting the lift of her Christian bust over the keyboard. She was reading what he had written. "Is a sad poem," she said.

"It's how I feel about people going away and leaving people they love behind — But you wan to type?"

"I won' spoil you' machine?"

Terrence laughed and got up with his mouth filled. He pulled out his poem and rolled a pair of new sheets into the machine. "Go on," he said, retreating to the table. "Type away." But when he sat once more before the spicy meal his original hunger was being replaced by another. He got up . . . he thought he had to get up. He thought he should go to her, but he steered himself to the lav to urinate. Her slow typing came in to him . . . CHUCKA . . . CHUCKA-CHUCKA . . . CHUCKA . . . His penis, gripped tightly in both hands,

filled rapidly. GOD! the devil was on his back. He fought to control his breathing, and won.

CHUCKA . . . CHUCKA . . . CHUCKA-CHUCKA . . .

Out of the lav, he approached Gweneth . . .

CHUCKA . . . CHUCKA . . . CHUCKA

Then he was behind her. "You're quite a typist," he complimented. She laughed. She was typing her name.

"How you's get capital letters?"

His head was bent over her left shoulder and his heart was beating terribly in his own ears.

"Capitals?"

"Yeah . . ."

He brought his arms around and showed her the shift keys on the left and the right. And with his arms around her he quickly typed her name: Gweneth Richmond and she laughed and he encased her in his arms and snuggled his face against her neck. She trembled but did not protest. He brought his hands up and she was bra-less. He squeezed gently and she moaned. "Gweneth . . . Gweneth . . ." he whispered. She moaned. "Stand up . . ." he whispered. She stood, and he turned her and kissed her open mouth and she was unlearned and eager in her kissing — lapping at his open mouth. Wet buttery kisses.

## ARTICLES

### THE NOVELS OF O. R. DATHORNE

by A. L. McLEOD

In 1963 the British publishing house of Cassell issued **Dumplings in the Soup**, the first novel of 29-year-old O. R. Dathorne, a Guyanese-born graduate of the University of Sheffield; in the following year it published his **The Scholarman**. Clearly, Cassell must have felt confident that another Caribbean writer of quality commercial (if not literary) fiction had been discovered: here was a writer with the fluency of Edgar Mittelholzer, the comic deftness and penchant for the poetic passage of Samuel Selvon, and unmistakable signs of the penetrating social criticism, droll humor, and facile narrative action (if not of the magisterial tone and point-of-view) of V. S. Naipaul. Furthermore, the two books covered essentially different but topical and important subjects: the first, the difficulties of West Indian assimilation into British urban life; the second, the search by a West Indian of African heritage for an understanding and appreciation of contemporary African culture and attitudes that had eluded him throughout his years of maturation in the West Indies and that had become inaccessible to him through his education in the United Kingdom and his subsequent adoption of British attitudes and sensibilities.

**Dumplings in the Soup** received very little critical attention; **The Scholarman** received more, including a positive, perceptive, and balanced review by John Povey in **Books Abroad**. For whatever reason, thereafter Dathorne abandoned creative writing for critical and anthological work, editing **Caribbean Narrative** in 1966 and **Caribbean Verse** in 1967. The first of these contains an introductory essay of about 6000 words that is still one of the best general accounts of modern Caribbean prose fiction: it identifies the principal problems facing West Indian writers, isolates the achievements and shortcomings of the major authors (such as Harris, Lamming, Naipaul, Hearne and Mais), and draws special attention to the several contributions of others (such as Reid, Williams, Salkey Dawes and de Lisser) who have seldom received adequate recognition. **Caribbean Verse** likewise has a provocative, succinct introduction that discusses prevailing critical positions on Caribbean writing (such as John Figueroa's view that early West Indian poetry was debilitated by a loss of faith and a loss of love) and provides the editor's own, often in epigrammatic form—as in his conclusion that “West Indian poets were most successful when they managed to free themselves from their incestuous relationship with the landscape” and that “our poets have remained as attendants and surgeons of our word.”

More recently, Dathorne has written **Dark Ancestors: The Literature of the Black Man in the Caribbean** (1981), has delivered a number of academic papers (increasingly concerned with the African elements in Caribbean culture), and assumed the general editorship of **The Journal of Caribbean Studies**. But just when one might have concluded that he had abandoned creative for critical writing, excerpts from work in progress have appeared in **Caribbean Quarterly**, **Caliban**, and **The Journal of Caribbean Studies**. In 1981 a short piece identified

as the Postscript "from the novel **Celebration**" was published; the others have been excerpts from **Dele's Child**, and it seems that all are actually part of the same work, to be published as **Dele's Child**. However, at the present Dathorne's stature as a novelist depends upon just two works, both published over twenty years ago; and it is not inappropriate that we should examine them to determine his aspirations and achievement.

**Dumplings in the Soup**, like most first novels, is — if not actually autobiographical — heavily dependent upon personal experience for its story-line, characters and locale. Because it deals with an immigrant student's life in a British university town, it might seem to be both academic novel and **Bildungsroman**, but the lack of focus on the student himself removes it from both categories: instead of providing an account of academic politics and perfidies or of self-discovery and maturation, the novel is essentially an episodic narrative of the coexistence of a heterogenous group of boarders, with particular attention to the actions of Bofo, the least admirable of the characters although he is described as "a man of fastidious tastes" and — paradoxically — as "a pitiful model of sartorial untidiness." (One suspects that his name is a derivative of the Italian **buffo**, for he is really a figure of fun, a stock presentation of the opportunistic wastrel who lives by his wits). Because Bofo is made the central individual — protagonist would hardly be an appropriate term — it would seem that the author intends to paint a cautionary canvas, to use him as a foil to the aspiring student and show that his philosophy, his very manner of existence, is to be deprecated. But this does not occur: Bofo is intractable; he manages to sponge along merrily.

The other residents of No. 30 (which is described as "a rest-house, hotel, hostel, and brothel, all rolled into one" and as an address "full of smells and smoke") are a motley crew — and perhaps not fundamentally different from those to be found in any similar boarding-house. While they are representatives of types, they are at the same time individualized by their particular eccentricities or by their pseudonymous street-names. There is Bigphil with his generally faithful mistress, Hazel; Pouncy, the bus conductress who is given to wearing her uniform continuously; Jiffy Jacket, a Trinidadian architecture student; Lilphil, Pouncy's lover; Bill, the English working-class landlord who makes a comfortable living from overcharging for rented rooms in substandard housing; and an anonymous Pole.

The doings of the group are hardly extraordinary and suggest little real invention on the part of the novelist; in fact, both characters and action seem dependent upon reportage and reminiscence — the accumulation of antics, anecdotes, misadventures and misunderstandings that are the stock-in-trade of the reporter or raconteur. Apparently aware of this, the publisher advises readers that "this quaint and colourful crew . . . and the author's vibrant, bubbling sense of humour ensure that **Dumplings in the Soup** is a happy diversion rather than a social commentary." (This reminds us that Graham Greene described some of his early works as "entertainments," and that Rex Warner's **Escapade** (1953) carried a similar disclaimer by the publisher, who advised that the novel "has

been written especially for the enjoyment and entertainment of the reader — and for no serious reason. No lesson is expected to be drawn from it.”)

Notwithstanding the disclaimer, there is social commentary in **Dumplings in the Soup**, and most of it supports Eurocentric attitudes to the lifestyle of West Indians. The residents of No. 30 seem content to depend upon the welfare system for sustenance; they seldom retire before midnight, and “they had parties in the middle of the week till three or four in the morning, parties which . . . indeed went on well into the succeeding day” (111); glass in windows and doors is repeatedly broken and long left unrepaired (or replaced by brown paper and cardboard); rooms are cluttered and unclean; garbage is strewn at random; phonographs are played with “voluminous disharmony.”

The non-West Indian neighbours “saw that soon their little quiet street would be taken over by hordes of semi-savages who, in their mind’s eye, they saw engaged in all sort of unbecoming practices.” Not the least of these was their disdain for the Work Ethic, for which they substituted what we might term a Leisure Ethic :

The inhabitants of Number 30 were all deeply religious and expressed their religious feelings most on Sundays. The weekdays may have been spent in any number of evil pursuits, but Sunday was considered by one and all to be the day of rest. This is not to imply that the inhabitants interpreted this to mean that they could not enjoy their rest on Mondays or Tuesdays, or any other day that seemed too cold to broach the thought of work as early as midday, but that they considered Sunday as a day, so to speak, specially set aside by the All-knowing One for them to completely disinterest themselves in anything savouring of work. (138)

Yet more aggravating, surely, are the West Indians’ behavioural patterns that are mentioned in Chapter 22, “Fears, Please” : drunkenness, uncleanness, wife-beating, infidelity, intra-household larceny, poverty, parasitism, prostitution, and lechery. As Jiffy comments ruefully, “Marriage is white people concern” (169) : it is a nicety that those in Number 30 find irrelevant in their circumstances, which Jiffy identifies poignantly for Hazel : “Every black man in England hustling for identity. Right? And no black man think he is any kind of representative o’ anything. He just hustling hard like anything.” (170).

Because of Dathorne’s considerable skill at capturing dialect, in gaining the reader’s sympathy for the unfortunate residents of No. 30, and in presenting their outlooks and activities in a dispassionate, reportorial mode, we are almost never aware of his social commentary : whenever it starts to show, his ebullient sense of humour surfaces, and we are absorbed in the entertaining rather than the depressing aspects of the characters’ existence. It is this constant victory of levity over morality that differentiates **Dumplings in the Soup** from, say, Claude McKay’s **Home to Harlem**, which W. E. B. DuBois attacked for its social realism, of all things — for having been too candid in the depiction of life among the black residents of Harlem in the 1920’s. To have drawn a picture of black life in Britain that was undifferentiated from the white would have been indefensible; likewise, to have shown it without its lighter side would have been

unrealistic. But as Jiffy comments, "Coming here to England was an education in itself. You really came to grips with naked reality. In the West Indies everyone was play-acting at being real. Here the reality was so real that it frightened you with the immensity of it." (30).

Dathorne's gift for dialect has been noted: whether English working-class, Polish immigrant, or West Indian, it has impressive verisimilitude. In addition, he has a highly commendable gift for description — both of person and atmosphere: no two black faces are indistinguishable after he has introduced them. And whether the mood be one of sexual enticement or of physical confrontation, we sense its precise definition in prose of a high order. A sense of proportion prevails. What could be expanded gratuitously into a salacious passage is restrained, so that it provides detail that is needed and intimates (often by circumlocution or euphemism) what it is not necessary to depict. Here is an example: Jiffy is making love to Hazel, Bigphil's mistress:

'Something is not right 'bout this Hazel, man,' Jiffy said. He spoke next to her right breast. It pouted its nipple at him, filled the crevice of his lips with its soft, round contour. And then, as his nose hung on her neck-line, her mouth came out to touch him and her tongue tapped at the lower regions of his neck. He fell across the bed, and Hazel clung on with her teeth. His whole body sprang to life; the aching pain left his groin, and instead there was a stabbing joy somewhere beneath his abdomen. He pushed at her hard, and she fell on his mouth, crying with her eyes, but not with her body. His cheeks were full of saliva and sweat, and when he kissed her he tasted the salt of her sweat and tears before his tongue drew at hers. (58)

Yet in the several sexually-explicit passages of both **Dumplings in the Soup** and **The Scholar-man** there is sexist language: no one seems to have an erection *per se* (there is always a "pain in the groin" or "joy beneath the abdomen"), and although breasts range from "small, firm" to "pillow-sized," all the women characters seem to have wet thighs. Is this the result of limited vocabulary or limited experience? That it is not the result of language deficiency is suggested by Dathorne's gift for metaphor — especially for vivid and telling similes. Here are a few: "This sounded . . . like a Red Indian chess player's declaration of love in code"; "his right leg clawed the floor like some giant shovel"; "Bofo told him thirty pounds, rolling it off like a man with a life-sore on his tongue"; "the street noises sounded like thoughts"; "a shape like an existentialist teapot caught off guard"; and "virginity, like Omar Khayyam's finger, was beyond recall." Others of similar originality abound.

From the Introduction to **Caribbean Narrative** we can deduce Dathorne's aspiration in writing **Dumplings in the Soup**, for there he writes with great concern for the lack of comic writers in the West Indies, identifying just two of merit (Naipaul and Selvon) and two of minor achievement (Edgar Mittelholzer and Alvin Bennett). And he notes that:

West Indian comedy seems to lie mainly in character, language, and to a less extent in incident. Personal names, drawn from the inanimate or the trivial, provide a large element of the comic delineation . . . where Naipaul and Selvon succeed best is in creating a succession of bright eccentrics who do little, but whose eccentricity is in how they act and how they speak. (13)

This is clearly the formula that he was following in **Dumplings in the Soup**, though the characters are neither bright nor truly eccentric. Even their names (though the digression on Stan's name in **The Scholar-man** suggests an interest in onomastics) are prosaic and humourless. The incidents, while amusing, are seldom truly comic or original.

What then, accounts for the inadequacy of **Dumplings in the Soup** as a true challenge to the comic novels of Naipaul, Selvon and Mittelholzer? Fundamentally, it is the absence of a plot that unifies the actions and interests of either Jiffy or Bofo — the main characters. As Thomas Hardy observed, "a story must be worth the telling, and a good deal of life is not worth any such thing." This is not a very startling observation on literary theory, but it has substance. Reportage and vignettes are pale substitutes for plot and characterisation, without which no satisfactory novel yet seems possible.

**The Scholar-man** is a more ambitious — and at the same time a more satisfactory — novel than **Dumplings in the Soup**. The explanation may rest in the satiric rather than the comic mode that informs the entire work. After all, one laughs at the little things that amuse, but one satirises the grand deficiencies of government, church, and human relationships that threaten to defeat man's most laudable goals for the amelioration of misery and the advancement of all.

In form, **The Scholar-man** is a continuation of **Dumplings in the Soup**, for it chronicles the experiences of a Trinidadian graduate of a British university who takes up an appointment as lecturer in English in the University of West Africa. (Dathorne's personal experience in such a role in Nigeria obviously provided the substance of the novel.) It includes many of the set-pieces of the academic novel. John Povey has observed similarities in the burned bed-sheets incident to one in **Lucky Jim** and in the retelling of "schoolboy howlers" from examination papers to D. J. Enright's **Academic Year**, but these are almost obligatory ingredients of the genre — as are sexual encounters, social gaffes, inter-departmental frictions, and disillusionment with both the academic life and its social pretensions.

But **The Scholar-man** is something more: As Louis James notes in **The Islands in Between**, "There is a difference between Africa in West Indian writing and West Indians in Africa. In the first case, Africa is of the mind; in the other, it is social reality whose struggle for emancipation parallels that of the Caribbean" (6-7). By placing his story in West Africa, the author can point out analogues and satirise without causing offense at home.

The protagonist of the novel is Adam Questus, who Kenneth Ramchand thinks a "mechanically named hero." Adam himself muses on his name: "Questus. It sounds so earnest, as if I was looking for something" (48). And, of course, he is — as are E. M. Forster's Miss Quested, Doris Lessing's Martha Quest, and most other people (including the Questers, Questels, and Questins in phone books). But Adam's search is for a rather special type of person — for Mr. Egor, a mulatto born in Britain who had befriended Adam to the point of establishing

a close homosexual link in his youth. This relationship is described in the Prologue to the novel in prose of very special beauty and sensitivity :

The river hurried from the jungle and here on the coast the brown water dissolved into the sea. The river bank was purple and palms knelt close to the edge of the water. Above were the high hills of Adventure, where houses sat in irregular lines, and the air was heavy with lime scent and guava.

The boy used to come racing out of the house, and behind the huge tree-stump he would wait naked. The man always came from behind the courida trees. The man could not have been more than thirty at the time. He was smooth and beautiful . . . and the man swam near, scented of cool water and spring-wet and foaming trees in the sun; sometimes he floated on his back, spurting jets of warm dark spray skywards, and the boy swam near him, holding hands, rocked on the mattress of wave-water. (1)

Elsewhere we learn that Egor is "not an African. He only thinks he's one . . . he is young and full . . . everything I wanted to be and more." He is, in fact, a symbol of the amalgamation of the best and gentlest in European and African, the ideal compromise, the middle way, Adam's goal. Egor the mulatto represents Whitmanesque bisexuality, Afro-European culture. Against him Adam judges himself, always implying the question that Abioseh Nicol poses in his poem "The Meaning of Africa" : "Is this all you are?" To the responsive and responsible, it is a challenge to ever greater achievement; to others it is the ultimate indictment for infidelity and indolence. Adam's response was that "he felt very much alone."

This aloneness, this sense of alienation is the result of Adam's recognition that blackness *per se* does not provide a West Indian with a sense of identification with Africa any more than whiteness gives an Australian any sense of identification with Europe or North America : colour alone is irrelevant in the search for personal and cultural identity, and even Adam's participation in a Comfa dance, with its whipping and physical violence, brings him severe embarrassment rather than satisfaction and elation. Eventually, embarrassment gives way to shame, and shame to satire.

It is in his satiric thrusts that Dathorne manages the Horatian mode consistently and elegantly, restricting his barbs for the mountebanks, the poseurs, the cheats and opportunists, and never even inadvertently using irony in his dealings with the masses, the common people, the sincere and dedicated. Both Africans and Europeans are equally subjected to censure : Mrs. Farrar's "cremated food," her "chips from a forgotten world and faded green peas killed by their long sleep in tins, and flat frozen fish"—alien in an African environment — and the Polish lecturer Bielski's inordinate pride in his unmastered English language are matched by the slop that African students are offered and the pride of the student leaders in their snippets of English and of literary criticism. Again, Farrar's puerile theories of teaching; his inordinate pride in his unpublished, mimeographed "books"; his constant absence from station; and his subterfuge in a B.Sc (Econ) degree while head of the English department have their parallels in the African community. The vice-chancellor (whose main qualification is his

precious headmastership of a primary school) goes off to England when Independence is being celebrated at home; the newly-independent West Africans dress in evening suits and sing "God Save the Queen" in the absence of a national anthem. They all soon discover that their independence means little more than the perpetuation of standing orders and the proliferation of bureaucracy, so that "West Africanisation . . . means a half-baked student turns up tomorrow as professor" (150) and ultimately "Africa destroying itself." (177).

To demonstrate the absurdity of Africanisation, Dathorne introduces Mr. Chatta Box, a member of parliament :

Mr. Chatta Box started off in the dialect. 'You no dey see that long green thing park under that tree there, eh? Hah! I askin' you, you standin' up listenin' to me—you ever see such a nice green thing like that? Eh? Well is a brand new American car park under that tree there. And you know who give me? . . . You and you and you.' He paused again and the crowd of students cheered Mr. Chatta Box wildly . . .

'Your vice-chancellor had made new Standing Order say that you must not stand to display cards. I say you can do it. I go make government order and deport him.' Someone whispered something to him and he said, 'I understand he is not an expatriate. We shall therefore send him back to bush. In conclusion, I say this college shall be razed to the ground and a new one will start. It only cost two million to build, and we can build it again.'

Then the students went wild with jubilation and took photographs of one another. Then Mr. Chatta Box bowed one or two times, spat, and drove away to have lunch with the vice-chancellor. (158)

Subjected to censure and satire are politicians' promises, performances, exalted living, self-interest, duplicity and bureaucratic bumbling.

Perhaps the most significant piece of dialogue in the novel occurs when Questus is asked by his students, "Are you African?" To this he has no suitable response : though he is Caribbean and black, he is officially described by the Government as "expatriate" — as are all the Europeans. So he replies, "Yes and no. I come from the West Indies." But his colour merely permits a superficial identification with Africa : at heart and in mind he does not belong there — a recognition that he shares with Farrar's daughter, Helen :

'I first came to England just at the time when one starts to think too intensely . . . Do you know,' he said suddenly, 'everything I have ever dreamt I wanted I could have found there. Isn't it strange — England, the black man's home!'

He was no foreigner. England was home, and the dales of Derbyshire was from where he got dreams, London's East End was where he had pawned his soul, and he had advertised his baseness under the lights of Piccadilly. (92)

This is, in effect, the ultimate shock of recognition for Adam, and its full profundity is emphasised when Helen Farrar comments a few lines later, with reference to discovering where to collect mail, "You have to find out for yourself. That's the tragedy." If we regard mail as communication with the rest of the

like all of us, has to discover who he is and what his meaningful relationships are. Apparently neither Dathorne nor Questus could discover his true identification with either the West Indies or Africa.

In the Epilogue to **The Scholar-man**, Questus returns to the country village near Mile Seven on the highway, where he seeks out the mad woman that he met when trying to learn the whereabouts of Egor :

She smelt of fresh wet sand, of green trees in silver rain and grey damp earth, and she lay on her back . . . she was smooth and living in the dark, Egor's second bridge. She lay with the unconcern of a child, her legs wide open, her head on the ground and her hands skyward. Something tightened in his trousers and he felt himself drawn to her splendid visions and her music and her thick thighs and her muscles, which were part of the earth out of which she drew and suffered and ate . . . The lightning spotlighted his coarse animal movements over her . . . Then the rain fell and he lay lost in this, his third baptism of mud and water; and he lay flat clutching her, feeling the shape of her huge breasts and the rain tickled his eyes and smoothed his eyes and the blessing of water poured down . . .; and in the madness of that rainy moment, in the slush and the lighted dark, the wet and the testimony of thunder, he knew. (180-181).

This is, of course, rather effective prose, though Kenneth Ramchand finds it somewhat over-written and marred by polysyndeton and the inclusion of **baptism, water, thunder, lightning**, and such words — all appropriate in the circumstances of an African thunderstorm — which he somehow identifies as incantatory. Ramchand, however, reserves his strongest criticism for the final two words, "he knew," which he finds incomprehensible :

Dathorne wishes to suggest that his hero has returned to the rejected earth-rhythms of the pre-expatriate Africa . . . Since the symbolism of the woman is never suggested elsewhere in the novel (she is realistically described on page 140, where she provokes disgust), and since this incident seems to take place gratuitously, the reader is left mystified. Questus 'knew', and so presumably does Dathorne, but neither can tell, for this is the end of the novel. (160)

Now, if the author had been any more explicit, he would have violated one of the principles of effective prose fiction; and by allowing the reader to provide the statement of exactly what Questus knew, he is observing an established tradition. But the symbolism of the woman is far from inexplicable : on page 140 she is described as completely naked, dust-covered, vacant and terror-filled in appearance, and with hair in disarray — hardly the same person as the one with "splendid visions and her thick thighs and her muscles" of the Epilogue. On first seeing her, she is repulsive; on a return, she is seductive : she is Africa herself, Earth-Mother and mistress.

Further, on Adam's initial visit to the village, he asks the whereabouts of Egor, and when told that he is dead, he can not accept this : "Perhaps it's better for me to believe he is dead, as the old man said. But I can't. I must keep trying to find him. If not here, then somewhere else." The concluding "he knew" reiterates the goal of his quest : Adam can never be satisfied with reality; he must continue the search for the ideal. He knew that he must continue his endless

search and that Africa was not his source of succour or his cultural home. "Africa is a world that means nothing," he says. "If, in a lifetime, a man born here still knows nothing about his tribe, then that is knowledge. You can't even know a little about Africa as such. The whole place is so damn complex."

As in **Dumplings in the Soup**, **The Scholar-man** contains numerous passages that demonstrate beyond doubt Dathorne's craftsmanship in language and mastery of metaphorical statement. Some examples have already been provided, but an additional one will illustrate this :

He did not know how long he lay there, but he realised that the night came down sudden and swift like a whore in a hurry, like a greedy baby that sucked up the cream of the mother day; and the darkness swooped and hung about, threatening like the black vultures, and God or somebody sewed on the stars like buttons. (95)

In a manner, Dathorne's two novels are segments of a single quest novel or **Bildungsroman** that has missing parts. The initial volume, dealing with life in Guyana and departure for England may have been passed up because it would replicate much of **Miguel Street**, **The Year in San Fernando**, or **Morning at the Office** (though this of itself should not be a sufficient reason); another volume should have followed *Questus* (by whatever name) from Africa to the United States; and a final one might well trace the quester from there to some Caribbean location and thus bring what is at present a single linear story to its logical conclusion in a cyclic structure.

Whether **Dele's Child** will reveal growth and development in Dathorne as a novelist remains uncertain : the excerpts that have appeared suggest that the motivating impetus is again African and West Indian; that it entertains the great issues of identity, goals, and culture; that it is less given to humour and irony. That is, that it is a novel of a quite different type. The reasons for this change are hard to determine, but they may be related to the critical failure of **Dumplings in the Soup** and **The Scholar-man**. There is little doubt that Dathorne saw the need for literary-quality fiction of true comedy and that he (like V. S. Naipaul) has a satiric bent of uncommon degree; but in his first two novels the magical mixture of comedy, satire, character, and incident eluded him; conversely: his seriousness of substance was often lost in levity. Apparently he has decided to change direction and purpose — at an age when most fiction writers have already produced their major works.

Whatever **Dele's Child** and any later novels may be like, Dathorne's first two novels deserve greater recognition than they have so far received : in their time they explored rather new territory; today they retain their intrinsic merits.

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# LETTER FROM ANGUILLA

by JAN AUGUSTIN

Chubby-cheeked children playing in open yards; sea-grapes, pomegranetes and dunks (called pomarettes) growing in profusion along narrow roads; an old woman guiding her sheep up a hill, the last rays of the sun bathing them all in pure gold. These are the pictures that flash across my mind at the name, 'Anguilla'.

The most northern of the Leewards, Anguilla has 35 square miles and a population of about seven thousand, the majority of whom are of African descent. Other residents tend to be Europeans either living permanently or on business. Tourist literature says there are more than thirty superb beaches, and indeed this tiny island is beautiful. It attracts tourists almost all year round because of its peace and quiet. With no local newspapers nor inquisitive photographers, Anguilla is ideal for people who want to get away from it all! Housing is of a high standard and there are absolutely no slums.

The main reference for Anguillan history is **Annals of Anquilla**, written by Dr. S. B. Fines who was both medical officer and magistrate (strange combination one must agree) from 1918 to 1923. He sets the year of discovery and settlement by the English as 1600. He notes that the island was called Anguilla because of its snake-like shape. It was reputed to be filled with alligators and other animals. Fortunately, the long periods of drought on the island must have dried up the swamps, so there are no longer any of these creatures. The only reminders of these reptiles are the rather large lizards that scuttle around everyone's yard and along foot-paths and roads.

Drought was another kind of blessing in disguise for Anguilla. In the 1890's a terrible drought brought great hardship to the people, and was later referred to as 'the great famine'. During this period, Anguillans left their homeland in large numbers for the sugar estates in Santo Domingo. This need for travel created a demand for boats, and today Anguillans enjoy the reputation of excellent builders of wooden sloops, schooners and fishing boats. Famous boat-builders include names like Liam Richardson, Macduff Richardson and Jefferson Gumbs. An old resident told me that when drought and famine again struck in the 1930's, there was a plan to evacuate all Anguillans to British Guiana as Guyana was known in those days. However, relief came and the plan was abandoned.

Today, Anguilla is a dry dusty island due to insufficient rainfall and a rocky soil, none of the lush greens and the profusion of colours in trees and plants as we know in Guyana. However, one can see small cottage gardens and larger land-scaping at hotels and villas. The main crops are green peas, corn and sweet potatoes. These are planted in bits of open land dotted around the island. However, what Anguilla loses in agriculture, it gains in the wide variety of fish and lobsters found in its waters. Lobsters from Anguilla have a good

market in nearby St. Maarten and other islands as they are considered a delicacy.

In addition to fishing and boat building, almost every Anguillan family keeps a few sheep and goats commonly referred to as 'animals'. These can be tethered in open pastures during the day, and then dutifully driven home in the evening for water and shelter. Yet there is no wide-spread high consumption of mutton and goat meat, as fish forms the staple protein for islanders. I once caught a glimpse of a large pig tied to a dunk's tree in someone's backyard, and I have seen some cows and a donkey.

As in all Caribbean islands, corn, tobacco, cotton and sugar were the main crops in early colonial times. With sugar came slaves, mostly from the Gold Coast. These crops were gradually abandoned and now there is scarcely any evidence of plantation life. No Chateau Margot chimney cuts the skyline. The most notable figure in Anguillan history, to my mind, is John Richardson, Governor of the island in early nineteenth century. Some of his heirs held high administrative positions on the island, and the name Richardson is still by far the most common, accounting for 108 of the 1000 names listed in the telephone directory. The closest rivals are Gumbs (58) and Hodge (56). From a Guyanese point of view, an important name in Anguillan history is Carter Rey. I discovered that as a young man he spent several years in British Guiana at the turn of the century, looking for gold. He was the son of a rich and powerful family, and upon his return to Anguilla filled the roles of island eccentric, country squire, benevolent landlord and philanthropist until his death in 1943 at the age of 78. The house in which he lived and died is now the presbytery for the only Catholic Church on the island — St. Gerard's. As I chatted with the resident priest in the large dining room, it was strange to find small threads of history running between Guyana and Anguilla.

The future of Anguilla certainly rests on the shoulders of its young people. There are six primary schools and one large secondary school, all providing adequate free education. According to the 1984 census, there is a high literacy rate, and almost every child completed his primary school education which goes to Standard 7. Future plans include the construction of a multilateral type school which will cater for all children leaving Primary School. In addition to Education expansion, a larger airport is planned to accommodate the growing number of tourists. Tourism is the most important industry, as it provides the most means of employment, both directly and indirectly.

As a British island, Anguilla may seem to be quite different from most of the islands with which we come into constant contact. But after one has read its history and has talked with its people, it is easy to understand that we are all of the sea and sun, one Caribbean people.

# THE 1986 CARIBBEAN WRITERS' CONFERENCE IN LONDON

A Testimony by A. J. SEYMOUR

In 1986, as a representative of the magazine **Kyk-over-Al**, I attended the three-day **Conference on Caribbean Writing** held in London over the period October 23-25, 1986. I was conscious of one of the main purposes of the Conference — that is, that it was to heighten the awareness in black communities in Britain of the Caribbean heritage that had come to them and to help teachers in schools confidently to convey this heritage to the black children in the classes under their control. There were a series of other objectives linked with this main educational aim — e.g. to change for the better the attitudes of the British public by increasing their knowledge of the cultural and artistic achievements of the Caribbean. The Conference served as a link between the Commonwealth Institute, on the one hand, and on the other, the Governments of the Commonwealth Caribbean and the people of Caribbean descent living in the United Kingdom, many of whom had begun to migrate to the U.K. in the 1950's.

James Berry, a Jamaican poet, writing in **The Voice of the week** ending October 25, 1986, from a position of authority and influence, said "The coming Conference on Caribbean writing to be held at the Commonwealth Institute from October 23-25 marks an important staging post in the history of Caribbean writing. First is the fact that the Caribbean is remarkable in the number of writers it has produced, given its geography and population size. Second, the conference is a kind of watershed between those writers of the older tradition and the new writers who have also emerged from a direct English experience".

James Berry, referring to the Caribbean writers coming to London as "The Arrivants", stated these would come to an assured audience. "Exchanges of common interests with a general clock-in on personal developments will have an open-minded audience from Britain and other white world countries. Drawn largely from areas of education, general readers, individuals with a forward outlook and those purely with a curiosity, the various audiences will listen to the writers with open ears and eyes".

Maggie Butcher, Acting Head, Education Department of the Commonwealth Institute, had her own way of describing the Conference in a letter to AJS of June 3, 1985, "What we are at present discussing is a **celebration of Caribbean literature** with as many writers and critics as possible coming together to discuss their work, with one of the practical outcomes being the preparation of video programmes on writers and their background for the use in Britain and the Caribbean schools, teachers, community groups and the like. There is much concern in Britain following the publication of the Swann Report on the needs of black children in our schools and this project will contribute to fulfilling those needs as well as reaching a wider audience who may or may not be familiar with Caribbean writers."

In my letter to Maggie Butcher and sometimes in my editorials in **Kyk-over-Al** I made suggestions to enlarge the objectives of the Conference. One nation in the region should be asked to look at the six seminal texts in the Anglo-Caribbean which we had named as the Big Six — House for Mr. Biswas, In the Castle of My Skin, New Day, Kaywana Trilogy, Palace of the Peacock and The Arrivants. Since that list was compiled, many years ago, several West Indian novels and books have been published. Surely the Adult Education Associations in the Anglo-Caribbean might wish to examine the six against new comers and see if anyone should be replaced by a new book published more recently and fast becoming a classic. For that matter, the new black British Caribbean writers could also have a shot at voting for the Best Caribbean Books.

Then there was Alex Pascall, born in Grenada, who arrived in Britain more than 26 years ago with two drums, one suitcase and the desire to become a folklorist. He was appointed National U.K. Co-ordinator of **Caribbean Focus 1986**. He felt that Britain had been forced to take note of the growth of the West Indian community in England, of the strong influence of Afro-Caribbean rhythms on Western rock music, and the happenings in the Caribbean itself (volcanic eruptions, floods and the Grenada affair). These had all combined to make Britain take note of the Caribbean and to try to understand it. It was now time for Britain to acknowledge its debt to the Caribbean for the labour, raw materials and art forms received from that source, and stop trying to fight against the inevitable influences.

I would place my reactions to the Conference in three categories. First of all, I greatly enjoyed the celebration aspect, meeting after so many years the cream of the writers, some not seen for decades, some never seen before, and some with whom I have been corresponding for years. Eddie Brathwaite and I have been consulting one another's views for a long time, but Raymond Barrow of Belize I have known only at the bottom of letters and I was happy to meet him at last. Micky Hendricks was also new to me, but I had known and admired his work for a long time. Wordsworth McAndrew I had lost touch of and was glad to meet again. Claire Harris I had met in a group of writers in Calgary, Alberta, some months before. And it was good to chat again with Austin Clarke and Mervyn Morris and Olive Senior and Earl Lovelace as I was caught in a photograph.

For the Caribbean poets, we were also celebrating the publication of a book which dominated the Conference — Paula Burnett's **Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English**. Although Paula was not of West Indian origin, nor a poet, her selections have sewn together the scribal and oral traditions in a fine historical presentation of the complexity and the totality of the Caribbean creative experience; and it is interesting to see the way the ancient root of music now marries the literary and the vernacular as a vitalising element.

Mind you, I agree with Susheila Nastor in **Artrage No. 12** that Paula Burnett should and could have discussed the very important part played by

women poets in the region and with Ian McDonald in **Kyk-over-Al** No. 35 that the East Indian strain in Caribbean poetry could have been strengthened in its representation with Mahadai Das and Rooplall Monar especially.

But the Anthology is a witness that centuries of slavery and colonialism have stimulated the human psyche to creative fruit that the world can admire. Bravo the Caribbean.

Neither the Conference nor the Anthology did much to prophesy the way ahead for Caribbean creativity in forms and direction. Literature and the other arts have to depend upon political will and therefore money even when genius is evident in the work. As we talked in a coterie of creative imaginations, we could only hope and pray that the dialogue between the London outreach and the Caribbean bases of culture will somehow benefit us all.

So I took pleasure in the celebration.

The second point that came home to me was my great pleasure that there were three new Guyanese women novelists who had begun to publish books — Beryl Gilroy, Grace Nichols and Janice Shinebourne. Women have a realistic attitude to life and these three novels — **Frangipani House**, **The Whole of a Morning Sky** and **Timepiece**, all published in 1986, seek to record the difficult crises through which women have to pass in their lifetime.

Nan Singh is writing a review of these novels to introduce them to the Guyanese and West Indian people, and all I need say here is that Beryl Gilroy, who went in 1951 to Britain as a trained, experienced school teacher, eventually became Headmistress of a North London School, and between 1970 and 1975, wrote a series of children's books for Macmillan. Then in 1976 she published **Black Teacher**, the chronicle of her experiences as the only Black headmistress in her London Borough. In 1982 she won a prize for her book **In for a Penny** and in 1985, **Frangipani House** won a prize in the GLC Black Literature Competition.

There is one common feature of the other two novels, a treatment of the race conflicts between Africans and Indians that took place in Guyana in the early 1960's, and the narratives show how families on one or both sides were affected. Incidentally the title of Grace Nichols' novel, "The Whole of a Morning Sky" is a quotation from one of Martin Carter's poems.

I took pleasure also in noting that in January 1987, Karnak House — was scheduled to publish a book of poetry **Guyana My Altar** by Marc Matthews. This is his first collection of poems although Marc Matthews has been writing for years in an audacious and highly inventive use of the nation-language, the vernacular of his native land. The advertisement says that the poems delve deeply into Guyanese mythologies going back to the Dutch and the Amerindian heritages. Marc has acted in experimental plays and is regarded as an important literary voice.

There is a third area of reaction from my presence at the October Conference — a personal reaction. As I entered into the agenda, I found that I had been booked for being Chairman on the first afternoon to two lectures, one by Professor John Figueroa on **Caribbean Voices in Caribbean Literature** and the other by Dr. Rhonda Cobham on **New Developments in Caribbean Literature**. Immediately after that I was earmarked as Convenor of a workshop on Early Days of Caribbean writing. I felt a little overworked, but as audience reaction developed I began to realise that I was one of the senior personnel present and that I was being treated as an historical monument in my own person. In other words, I could possibly walk quietly into some museum, take a seat somewhere and smile benignly as others crowded around and either touched my three-piece suit or my bowtie, or addressed questions to me on the inner aspects of the West Indian writers of the forties when many of us believed that we were creating the inner spiritual dynamic of a West Indian Federation with the poems we were devising.

This personal reaction was enhanced later in the Agenda when Professor Eddie Brathwaite stressed the importance of what he called Father Figures in West Indian Literature, and among others, my name was called and I was invited to stand up and be seen by the participants present.

Then in the interval between items, I was conscious of the goodwill of many others being expressed one way or another: of course I was conscious of the fact that I had been writing poetry for more than fifty years and that my fellow poets of younger years had had me as an example over decades and that they were meeting me for the first time, almost incredibly, and I seemed able to respond favourably to their comments and questions, all the more since Guyana, my homeland, had fashioned a reputation of being a hard country in many ways. So I was one of the several faces of **Focus** and happily still in focus.

It was on my return home to Guyana that I would be interviewed on **Night Ride** and asked by the newspaper what my half century of poetry-writing had meant to me, but the Conference in October 1986, was meaningful in bringing home to me that I had played a part in laying the foundation and that through **Kyk-over-Al** Ian McDonald and I were still affording young writers an opportunity to be read and appreciated.

**Caribbean Focus** had a slogan for the people of England — “Widen your vision, sharpen your focus”. **Focus** had a nine-month programme from March to November 1986 and bringing to London through the Commonwealth Institute the richness, diversity, colour and splendour of life in the English-speaking Caribbean.

Looking at the programme, it is evident that Guyana made a special Amerindian and a special East Indian input into **Focus**. For example, Denis Williams organised a 24-panel exhibition on the Amerindian heritage. George Simon accompanied the exhibition and answered questions. George Tancredo of St. Ignatius made figures out of balata before the fascinated audiences, fashioning trees, animals, birds and people while the visitors looked on. Sidney

Daniels of St. Cuthbert displayed the techniques of weaving baskets so that all could see.

A special exhibition on Indian Immigration into Guyana over the years was prepared and presented by Laxmie Kallicharran and opened by Commonwealth Secretary-General, Sir Shridath Ramphal, and like the Denis Williams Exhibition this was on show for six weeks. A dancing group of fifteen members from Kabakaburi, led by Sister Theresa La Rose, was present at **Focus** and performed at concerts there.

One newspaper reported that **Focus** provided a brief insight into West Indian life for tens of thousands of younger generation Black Englishmen of West Indian parentage who have never visited the West Indies. The insight may well serve as an impetus to many at least to visit the countries of the Caribbean and to discover their roots. Maggie Butcher states that an English writer, Louis James, has been commissioned to write a comprehensive account of **Focus** for all to see. We all look forward to seeing what the nine-month emphasis on cultural identity will produce.

# YEARS OF FIGHTING EXILE: MILTON VISHNU WILLIAMS

Peepal Tree Press

It seems likely that the order in which the poems in this collection are published is more or less the order in which they were written. At any rate there seems to be a distinct increase in poetic power as one reads on. Several of the "earlier" poems can be classified as "public" whereas the "later" poems are predominantly "private". The distinction between "public" and "private" poetry is one that ought not to exist; every private self is a social construct just as one's public self cannot but be a version of the private. However, the condition of exile probably makes the distinction inevitable since it is precisely the disjunction between self and community, whether it be the community of past or present, that constitutes the exiles ground of struggle. Now in such poems as "Sometimes a Man", "Well of Love" or "The Dancers", poems concerned, on the most obvious level, with the experience of being a colonial in British Guiana, one senses the presence of Martin Carter's influence (compare these poems with "Do not Stare at Me", "I am no Soldier" and "University of Hunger" respectively) to such an extent that the experience they convey seems second-hand. All poems are derivative but not all derivativeness is poetry; sometimes it is only repetition.

By contrast, "To Alice" and "Ann Whittaker" deal with love, that most ordinary of miracles, in a way that makes it seem magical. If the former poem puts the reader in mind of Osip Mandelstam, this would be by way of attempting to define the mode of that literary experience rather than to suggest the literary "influence" has taken the place of experience. However it is not simply the case that the poet's gift is for the personal rather than the public theme. "Naziban", which is printed near the beginning of the book, does not really move beyond an anecdotal interest in a boy's discovery of sex. "Sent Away And Asked To Keep Quiet", an "early" poem about the Enmore riots, is similarly anecdotal. However, there is no poem about a public event in the second half of the collection which equals "Ann Whittaker" or "Alter the Method of Your Coming" for that sense of authenticity (by which I do not mean "sincerity") that makes a poem. Perhaps after all, we must listen when the poet says in "Voices, Voices",

"I swear to struggle no longer to free certain  
men of the world. My role is to know and express  
loveliness. Praise the clean scythe of beauty that  
unbounds me."

These poems sometimes approach the familiar issue of historylessness and deprivation through the personal situation of the poet as in "Sponge of My Shame". They range from protest to bawdiness with room for celebration somewhere between. They are sometimes (very rarely) technically unsure as when an odd phrase like "the monsoon of unafraid" interrupts a quite different linguistic context for no reason apparent to this reviewer.

Jeremy Poynting's useful Introduction unfortunately over-simplifies the role of Queen's College (mis-named Queen's Royal College) and of the colonial education system in Guyana's history. To read that it might be good fortune that kept Milton Williams out of Queen's College is odd; consider that that elitist English institution produced the leaders of all of the important left-wing parties but none of the leaders of right-wing ones. The point is worth making since the bizarre necessity of acquiring someone else's language and culture in order to fight them and the schizophrenia that this entails are not explicitly acknowledged by Williams but seem to be at the heart of some of his love-poems nevertheless. This pain is not to be assuaged by opposing the Public Library to Queen's College.

JEFFREY ROBINSON

## REVIEWS

Rooplall Monar, **BACKDAM PEOPLE**, Peepal Tree Press,  
Leeds, England, 1985

**Backdam People** is a collection of eleven stories which are unique in West Indian literature because they are written entirely in Guyanese dialect. This is not the dialect used in full-length narratives by authors such as Samuel Selvon (Trinidad) and Vic Reid (Jamaica). Selvon and Reid write about more creolised West Indians, whereas Monar's characters are unlettered, Indian, sugar estate labourers whose speech reflects some influence from Indian languages. Monar does not reproduce this speech with complete, literal exactness. Words such as "morgue, expectation, rehearsing, spectacle" are unlikely to be used by Monar's characters; but they don't alter the fact that the narrative of **Backdam People** captures, with great accuracy, the ribald earthiness and frank outspokenness of speech that flourished in rural Guyanese, during the first half of this century, and still survives today. In a general sense, the vocabulary, phrasing, syntax, imagery, and intonation of the narrative in **Backdam People** are all accurate. "Slippery like ochro" (p. 73), "thick-thick like conky" (p. 31), and "rattling like cane-punt chain" (p. 51) are images that have special resonance for the ears of Guyanese, and for rural rather than urban Guyanese.

Most of the stories in **Brickdam People** are set in the period around World War Two. At this time most Indians lived on sugar estates with a feudalistic structure bequeathed by the Caribbean plantation system of preceding centuries, when white proprietors owned everything, including their (African) workers. Although most of the overt brutality by which plantation owners enforced their authority had gone by World War Two, an atmosphere of enforcement remained. It is evident in the humiliating sycophancy, the debased grovelling, the insidious influence-seeking and peddling, and the all-pervading violence and brutality which affect most people in the stories in **Backdam People**. In these stories, the estate manager is mentioned in tones of hallowed respect and awe, as someone who could never be contacted directly by workers. If a worker had a request, he would pass it through intermediate stages of the feudalistic hierarchy until it reached the manager. Meanwhile, the worker waited in cowering expectation. This system spawned widespread scheming and plotting, envy, fear, suspicion, deceit, treachery and deviousness, all in the interest of survival.

We get a glimpse of the system from "Lakhan Chase Dispenser". It was common for workers to feign illness or exaggerate the seriousness of genuine illness, in order to evade the more gruelling forms of labour. In "Lakhan Chase Dispenser" the negro dispenser (chemist and druggist) who is extremely popular with the labourers, is given instructions that they should be treated quickly for minor illness, and made to resume work as soon as possible. Absenteeism was to be curbed and productivity increased because of war conditions in Europe which increased the European demand for sugar. In an effort to follow these instructions without damaging his good reputation with the labourers, Matthews hits on a scheme of secretly administering laxatives to people who appear to be feigning illness. In this way, the individual becomes truly indisposed for one day.

and can resume work the next day, feeling all the better for having had a purge. The scheme backfires when Lakhan wants time off to attend a funeral. The laxative he is given produces so many bowel movements, and so weakens him, that Lakhan is unable to attend the funeral. He angrily attacks Matthews with a cutlass and forces him to reveal his scheme.

The story is typical in so far as it illustrates the secrecy, trickery, and endless double-dealing and violence that pervade estate society. The workers' effort in resisting oppression is seen through their deliberate absenteeism. In the end, despite his murderous pursuit of Matthews, Lakhan and the dispenser are both presented as victims of the "bacra" or white administration. Lakhan "smack he tongue again as though he sorry for Matthews" (p.50). Lakhan's story is also typical because of its comic technique. It is in his use of comedy to reveal oppression and injustice that the author achieves greatest success in **Backdam People**. In most stories, the injustice is not explicitly mentioned: it is evident in the social structure and the relationships and situations of characters. Yet these relationships and situations are largely comic, whether they involve school pranks, superstition, domestic wrangles, cowardice, bullying or sexual infidelity. When the schoolboy Dhookie is flogged for cheating, his retaliation by stoning the teacher is so successful, that he eventually becomes the teacher's favourite. The main interest in Bully Boy's story is that, despite his strong-armed tactics, he is a coward at heart, and is afraid he may be found out. Sukul sneers at "jumbies" or ghosts until he is scared by one, and thereafter cannot venture out without being accompanied. Massala Maraj ingratiates himself to worm a favour out of the estate manager. Through his greed he loses the favour, but regains it through further ingratiating. "Bahadur" is another story about successful trickery, and "Who is the real Ol Higue" about superstition and gullibility. These brief descriptions suggest the essentially comic treatment of most relationships and situations in **Backdam People**.

The success of Monar's comic treatment is that it enables him to present scenes of gross violence and brutality without sentimentality. His stories win sympathy for the victims of oppression without lamenting over the conditions of oppression. Comedy highlights rather than conceals these conditions. The Ol Higue (witch) Sancharrie eventually commits suicide. Bully Boy is seriously injured by a "strong man". There are numerous beatings and threats, the favoured weapon being the cutlass which all labourers possess. Matthews has to jump through his dispensary window, knocking over pills and medicine bottles. Hakim and his paramour are caught "in flagrante delicto", by the paramour's cutlass-wielding husband. We laugh at all these incidents, but do not ignore the cruelty, pain and suffering involved. What we laugh at are the dramatic conflicts and confrontations. At any rate, the harsh lot of Monar's characters is never lost sight of:

it dawn on me true-true that the estate mule and oxen receiving better treatment and care and food than the sugar worker them, who punishing generation after generation, night and day, to make sugar profitable, and believe is they duty as the pandit and immam does say. (p. 91)

Explicit comments of this sort are not common in **Backdam People**. The book more effectively exposes injustice in those stories where the situations are re-

corded and their injustice implied. But the comments confirm the plight of Monar's characters whose lives are circumscribed on all sides, by social, political, economic and religious limitations. The world of these characters has much in common with the world of Chekhov's muzhiks and Zola's peasants whose raw, earthy, elemental concern for survival is all. But Monar's treatment has more in common with Mark Twain's comic reproduction of an equally raw, New World, frontier environment in **Huckleberry Finn**. His petty rivalries, unsubtle jockeying for advancement, and prankish violence for the sake of itself match the mindless feuding and vigorous, outdoor escapades in Twain. Chekhov and Zola are Old World Europeans. Twain and Monar write of new societies struggling to establish stable existence in a new environment.

In **Backdam People** the narrative technique matches this simple struggle for survival. Characters border on caricature, and many events are touched by exaggeration and stereotypical elements. Reactions can be automatic, and schemes instantly successful. In several stories, the plot is identical: A physically chastises B, and B seeks revenge through similar or worse physical chastisement. In some stories, the revenge pattern is a little more subtle, but on the whole, relationships are unsophisticated and events simplified.

The gesture of Jameela's father sharpening and testing the blade of his blind anger. But these apparently simplified reactions and gestures are part of a technique that is related to the conventions of fairy stories or the tall tale. Such cutlass in anticipation of revenge seems transparently obvious. Swearing or cursing is a standard reaction to express anything from enthusiastic approval to conventions deliberately stimulate our sense of drama and wonder, and this certainly occurs in **Backdam People**. Yet the drama and wonder emerge from perfectly shaped plots which present conflicts and resolve them with almost geometrical precision. When, for example, Hakim is injured by Jameela's father at the end of "Hakim Driver", the sweetness of revenge is accompanied by the vindication of justice, and the re-establishment of moral order. It is fitting that Hakim should become a "majee" or Muslim priest, the vocation he should have followed from the beginning.

The uniqueness of **Backdam People** lies in the combined treatment of its subject as well as in its language. This combination makes the volume a pioneering work many features of which are discussed in a useful introduction by Jeremy Poynting. Dr. Poynting's reference to "the neo-colonial business of metropolitan publication" raises an important issue, so far as the intellectual and imaginative resources of Third World people are concerned. It was one thing for Western nations, to plunder the natural and economic resources of Third World countries when formal colonial rule was the order of the day. It adds reckless insult to grievous injury if metropolitan publishers are now to exploit the imaginative efforts of Third World people for purely commercial reasons. To be sure, this is not what Dr. Poynting has done. As he suggests, even if paper were available in Guyana, there is no tradition of book publishing and buying to support the successful production and marketing of a book like **Backdam People**. In these circumstances, Dr. Poynting has performed an invaluable service. It is a service one should expect from Guyanese living abroad. If they are unable or unwilling to do it, one should not blame Dr. Poynting for doing it.

**"ZINDER", by STEWART BROWN, POETRY WALES  
PRESS, 1986**

Stewart Brown, editor of the fresh and imaginative anthology **Caribbean Poetry Now** (a note on which appears in this issue in "Across the Editor's Desk") is also an excellent poet with a growing number of beautiful poems to his name.

His collection **Zinder** draws his poems together for the first time from a variety of booklets, anthologies and magazines. The settings range over England, the Caribbean, and North Africa and, as the note on the book cover of this beautifully printed and produced book says, "their forms expand likewise from the lyric and personal poem to the long cultural exploration of the title poem".

The poems he writes are lucid and clear as a bright river. There is a sadness and sense of beauty lost which come perhaps from his travelling to places he grows to love and then must leave forever. His painterly eye (his own paintings and prints have been exhibited internationally) catches the fleeting loveliness and strangeness he finds everywhere he goes.

Stewart Brown lived and taught in Jamaica and has maintained a close interest in and love of Caribbean literature. The Caribbean breaks into his poems. Anansi into a Cornish garden. Hummingbirds in his beautiful poem "Flying Machines" :

"Outside my kitchen window two Cornish sparrows —  
tame and dowdy as the climate — play at humming birds  
hover laborious inches over the dawn,  
their clipped stub wing designed for soaring more  
then playing a tune on the wind, they flap, flap, flap  
    achingly,  
precariously perched between earth and sky like ancient  
    aircraft  
attempting to fly with balsa-wood, canvas and string.

My memory's window opens on a scene of real humming  
    birds  
hanging like bees in the cup of a croton,  
banana yellow and Caribbean green, streamlined  
    satellites  
flashing between Alamanda and Hibiscus,  
tame as the climate; never playing sparrows."

His poem "Test Match Sabina Park" will find a place in any cricketing anthology. England batting slowly in front of excited West Indian spectators is captured perfectly :

"England sixty-eight for none at lunch.  
'What sort of batting dat man?  
dem kaan play cricket again,  
praps dem should-a-borrow Lawrence Rowe!"

And on it goes, the wicket slow  
as the batting and the crowd restless.  
'Eh white bwoy, how you brudders dem  
does sen we sleep so? Me a pay monies  
fe watch dis foolishness? Cho!'

So I try to explain in my Hampshire drawl  
about conditions in Kent,  
about sticky wickets and muggy days  
and the monsoon season in Manchester  
but fail to convince even myself."

But the poems in this small yet splendid collection are universal. There are many to select and savour and read to know almost by heart. I loved, for instance, "Coherent Delirium" (one of Levi-Strauss's definitions of poetry) and "Calabash Carver, Chaffe" and "Fulani Beds" and the title poem "Zinder" (with its extraordinary lines describing leprous beggars "arranging their wounds as others do fruit"). However, my favourite of all is "Glad Rags", with its eternal theme of a son musing about his father :

".....a life so blessed  
in its bare lack of acquisitions —  
no house, no car, and nothing owed.  
A life of grime, of beating steel

Into a weekly envelope that could,  
Just, keep his family fed and clothed."

His reputation will grow.

IAN McDONALD

## JEAN RHYS : STILL WAITING FOR THE FUTURE

### “TALES OF THE WIDE CARIBBEAN”

The republication of some of Jean Rhys' short stories give them a second airing in the eighties. The advantage of this is that they do not appear in the shadow of her last novel **Wide Sargasso Sea** which brought her international acclaim at the end of the sixties (she was to die at the age of 78 only a few years later). Following this success her publisher rushed out the 3 novels and 3 collections of stories she had written mostly as a young woman in the twenties and thirties. They unloaded on to the reading public what it had taken Jean Rhys a lifetime to produce.

The dust has not settled on her reputation yet, a reputation that still suffers from the peculiar colours of colonial exoticism which has fused Europe and the Caribbean. Then too, when she was young and wanted desperately to write and be a writer, she adopted the chic, introverted postures of Parisian expatriate cafe society which the literary wolf, Ford Maddox Ford, taught her. Literary chic and her ethnic exoticism as a white Caribbean creole blended two exotic flowers bred in two different climates into an irresistible perfume. Critics have fought over her. Two questions have divided them : Was she a European or Caribbean writer? Was she a coward or courageous woman? Put simply, they were all asking : Who is she? The claims and counterclaims raged not only in the seventies but as soon as her work began to appear in the twenties.

The relationship between Europe and the Caribbean was a subject which haunted her writing for half a century. Critics have claimed it is symbolic of the conflicting values (of all kinds of specific sorts) represented by the two places. They say much the same about her portrayal of the relationship between men and women, and her portrayal of black and white people. As a result it has become possible for anyone to assign whatever values they wish to this variety of “differences” in her work. It all points to a single fact : that there are a multitude of elements critics cannot picture as a familiar whole.

What do these stories tell us? There is either a concrete or fantastic but always intense link which exists interchangeably in them between race, sex and class. The links are so powerful and understated they blur, as in the stories with a strong Caribbean setting: **Pioneers Oh Pioneers, The Day They Burned The Books, Fishy Waters, and Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose**. Their qualities echo in stories with a strong European setting: **Till September Petronella, Mannequin, and La Grosse Fifi** where European sex, race and class conflicts replace Caribbean ones. Rhys' ability to penetrate deep into the heartland of class conflicts in both Caribbean and European societies is not possessed by any other writer. These conflicts comprise a cornerstone of formative humanity : this dilemma is presented as a series of riddles for the reader to solve in these stories. No answers are given, only the experiences are presented with urgent commitment to recording them.

None of her stories can be read and wholly understood individually. You have to make daring links between them. They challenge you to define and

distinguish between fact and fantasy, past and future, instinct and rationality. They also ask you to explain the links between all those poles of being within parameters of a kind of human experience they describe. That experience is an intensely lived Caribbean childhood accompanied by an equally intensely lived exile in Europe with risky forays into assimilation, and then the pursuit of a particular sort of freedom which can both exorcise and sanctify the sufferings and happinesses of those experiences. You need to enter wholly into all those experiences because she writes characters not like a fiction writer but like a playwright, for acting. To catch her meanings when she is not sketching character you have to listen with ears tuned to poetry.

Jean Rhys was, in some important senses, one of the individual forerunners of the Caribbean people who were to come to Europe later in large numbers. She made her experiences have an impact here through the devices of writing and the literary establishment (but always as an outsider). The generation who came en masse later are still making their impact in a greater variety of ways than was possible in her time. She was only just beginning to enter into a dialogue with them when she died. In her autobiography **Smile Please** she was just beginning to talk to the future. It remains to be seen whether the pitfalls of experience she mapped out here hold any lessons for the future, whether the future will talk back.

JANICE SHINEBOURNE

## REVIEW OF THREE NOVELS BY GUYANESE WOMEN WRITING IN LONDON

'TIMEPIECE'	—	Janice Shinebourne
'FRANGIPANI HOUSE'	—	Beryl Gilroy
'WHOLE OF A MORNING SKY'	—	Grace Nichols.

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These three women who left Guyana between 1950 and 1980 have begun to put their Guyanese experiences into perspective writing.

Grace Nichols, who left these shores less than a decade ago, is known for her poems "I is a long memored woman" and "The Fat Black Woman's Poems". In this "her first adult novel" Grace Nichols describes the upheaval in a family's life when they leave their serene, comfortable country home to make a life in Georgetown amidst the social and political turmoil of the Pre-Independence days (1960-1964). Gem Walcott, who could have been a young Grace, is a living timepiece, remembering and missing the culture of the Highdam village and experiencing, at first hand, the magic of the city and the change in mood and flavour of life during a time of racial conflict.

Janice Shinebourne's "Timepiece" her first novel, is placed in the same historical time as Grace Nichol's. Her young heroine could have been the same age as Dinah Walcott in the previous novel mentioned. She ambitiously sets out from her estate home in Pheasant to work as a **Daily Mail** reporter and live with her aunt in Regent Street. A sensitive, morally strong character, she analyses her experiences with people she knew at home and those she met in her working life. The dualism in other peoples' lives confuses but does not shake her : Sandra Yansen survives the political upheaval of the office, the emigration of fellow reporters, the death of her mother. She returns home after her study abroad to find that Pheasant had changed during her absence and the matriarchs whose values she had absorbed had died. Sandra becomes a stronger, more independent woman for her experiences.

While both these stories are slices of the same historical time, they also reflect the authors' feelings that women were the main source of values in that society. The Highdam women with their love for "women talk" and their herbal cures are the counterparts of the Pheasant women who made their contribution to their immediate society and established respect and camaraderie from the village people.

In Grace Nichols' book, although Archie Walcott is the main character, he is not portrayed as one to admire. From a childhood in Essequibo, he grows up to marry a charming, lovable girl from Georgetown and ends up with a teaching post in the village of Highdam. Comfortable in the country, he is respected and feared as a headmaster, but does not seem to be able to make many friends. His strict, disciplinarian demeanour causes him to appear a loner, and he tries to force his value on his wife and children. He is slow at decision making, has to be prodded by circumstances and is fixed and inflexible.

Basically, men are not shown in an attractive light in these women's novels. They are too strict and a little unrational (as in Archie Walcott), too gullible a business man (as in Sandra's father), too morally weak and confused (as in the reporters of the **Daily Mail**) and shifting and unreliable as in Mama King's husband in **Frangipani House**.

This latter novel by Beryl Gilroy, a Prize Winner in the GLC Black Literature Competition, seems to be influenced somewhat by the London experience. An elderly writer with more than three decades in London, her work as a therapist may have exposed her to the fate of people in Homes for the Aged. Her story is of Mama King, an old, strong-willed, independent woman, being placed in a home (against her wishes if she was physically strong to choose) where those paid to care for her trample on her self-respect and dignity as a person. With her indomitable will, Mama King escapes the institution to return to the fascinating world of the poor.

With her use of flashbacks in soliloquy, Gilroy tells the story of **Mama King's life — a life of work and toil to raise her children and grandchildren, the desertion of her husband, the ingratitude of her daughters, the betrayal of friends.**

**Frangipani House** is a moving tale which also raises questions of familial and social responsibilities. Should family members sacrifice their lives and ambitions to repay the love and care of their elders? Should elderly people be put in institutions that are run by tyrants and be denied the closeness and friendship of other people? Surely one can live in a home yet have the pleasure of walking on grass, living by no unreasonable rules, feeling a part of the world and be given a chance to be responsible.

While Gilroy's story is placed in Guyana like the other two stories, it is based on a combination of Guyanese and London experiences. With the emigration of young Guyanese still rising, the problem of what to do and how to care for parents and grandparents is a real one. It is hoped that there are more happy endings in life as in this book, where Mama King is once again useful in the rearing of her two great-grandchildren in North America.

Again the strength of will and character in women is made the centre of a tale. It seems that the matriarchal society in which, it is supposed, these authors grew up has positive values. These authors seem to be writing positively of women in this Decade for Women, and they create some admirable lovable characters. Their links to their Guyanese backgrounds are still strong as imaginatively they evoke an authentic cultural life. Guyanese are sure to be thrilled by the works of their counterparts and to have bits of history to pass down to other generations.

NANDWATIE SINGH

## COUNTRY OF THE ONE-EYE GOD

— a review of Olive Senior's *Summer Lightning and Other Stories*,  
Longman Caribbean, 1986.

"Somewhere between the repetition of Sunday School lessons and the broken doll which the lady sent me one Christmas I lost what it was to be happy."

These opening lines from the story "Love Orange" seem to epitomise the theme of disenchantment which runs through this compelling collection of ten stories by Jamaican writer, Olive Senior. *Summer Lightning and Other Stories*, her first published collection, presents the reader with perceptive yet disturbing incursions into the "dark tunnel of childhood", a confusing and insecure milieu all too vulnerable to the depredations of the hostile adult world. For the child, that world is dominated by a vengeful god made manifest in the terror of sudden summer storms and housed in bat-infested churches.

Set in rural Jamaica, the tone of her stories is anything but pastoral. Senior transports us to a countryside where the speech patterns and the natural landscape are distinctly insular. The psychological and emotional landscapes, however, defy particularity. They are truly human and truly universal. Most of them explore the poignant anxieties of sensitive children faced with crudity, hypocrisy, greed. What characterises all of them is the mutual incomprehension and/or the betrayal of trust between offspring and parent, grandparent or parental substitute. They are left to act, as the epigraph to "Love Orange", enjoins them — "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" — Philipians.

In "Summer Lightning", the first story in the collection, Olive Senior introduces the reader to a thoughtful young boy who finds emotional and spiritual sanctuary in a room which houses objects fascinating to his childlike vision, and which nourish his artistic sensibility.

"as long as he was alone in this room he was happy because he knew instinctively that if in the world he had nothing else he was still rich because he had this space which allowed him to explore the secret places inside him".

But this safe place is not inviolate. At the end of the story we are left to wonder if he will become the victim of sexual abuse perpetrated by a seemingly mild-mannered old man. One fervently hopes, with the boy, that Brother Justice, the Rastafari man, will fulfil the promise which his name holds and stop the outrage about to be committed on such a delicate sensibility.

The grand-child, in "Country of the One-Eye God," by contrast, is the potential perpetrator of a violent assault on an aging grandmother who raised him. At the age of nineteen, his cynicism diverges sharply from her simple faith in God. He contends that for all her prayers and personal conversations with her God, her God is a one-eyed God who is too remote and exalted to care about the poor.

“Him only open his good eye to people who have everything already so him can pile up more thing on top of that. Him no business with ragtag and bob-tail like unno”.

The chilling aspect of this story, and others, is that the reader is almost persuaded of the accuracy of this judgement.

In the “Boy who loved Ice-Cream” there is a boy whose excited anticipation of his first-ever taste of ice-cream is expertly communicated to us through Senior’s art. When his father’s irrational suspicion of his mother’s fidelity rob the child of that ultimate pleasure, that art convinces us that the effect of such a mundane event is nothing short of cosmic in its implications for the human race.

In “Bright Thursdays”, the grand-child born outside of wedlock must bear the indignity of being passed off as “the little adopted”. When her longing for recognition by her father receives a cruel jolt, the deracination of any possibility of filial love is related to the fracture of faith in God.

Of the ten stories, three differ in theme from the majority. “Do Angels Wear Brassieres?” is an irreverent and witty put-down of humourless religious attitudes by a delightfully precocious young girl. “Real Old Time T’ing” tells in humorous style of the quiet triumph of an old man over his daughter’s machinations to alter his way of life. Ascot, in the story of that name, is the eternal Anansi figure who continues his deceptions even in foreign lands. Yet these last two amusing stories are tinged with the colours of betrayal of trust between parent and child.

“Ballad” concludes this volume on a more optimistic note, for here the innocence of the child heroine is complemented by the maturity of her compassion for the “scarlet woman” in the village. She recognises in Miss Rilla a woman with the joy of living in her soul. The adults see her as a daughter of Jezebel. Her teacher tears up a composition on “The Most Unforgettable Character I have Met”, because Miss Rilla is not a fit person for such a role. Her mother MeMa asserts that Miss Rilla will burn in Hell Fire, but she believes that, “Miss Rilla laughing so much that St. Peter take her in just to brighten up Heaven”, and that, “it better to laugh and make other people laugh and be happy too.”

But at the end of story (and the book) there is a statement with a double-edged effect in the innocent death-wish of the child narrator who is praying to God to take her to join Miss Rilla wherever she may be.

**Summer Lightning and Other Stories** is a significant contribution to the corpus of West Indian Literature. The theme of childhood is not new to the fiction. It has been particularly dominant in the writer’s quest for personal and social explication. In this work, however, the explication is more spiritual and psychological. Brother Justice in “Summer Lightning” explains that “Lightning is Jah’s triple vision. Is like X-ray”. And Senior’s artistic perception is that of summer lightning — a searing, uncompromising illumination of the inmost recesses of human nature.

JOHN ROLLINS

# POSTSCRIPT

## THE DEATH OF EDNA MANLEY MOURNED

As we were going to press the sad news of the death of Edna Manley, great Jamaican and Caribbean artist, came to us. AJS comments as follows :

“The death of the Jamaican sculptress, Edna Manley, leaves a deep wound on the Caribbean culturescope. Acclaimed in the Caribbean and in Europe, she has been described as one of the heroic figures of Jamaica for her work as an internationally famous sculptress in her own right, expressing “ a new ancestral vision of womanhood”. She was the wife of one Jamaican Prime Minister, Norman Manley, and the mother of another, Michael Manley.

Awarded the Silver Medal of the Institute of Jamaica in the thirties, awarded the first Gold Medal of the Institute in 1942, awarded the Order of Merit in Jamaica in 1980, deemed one of the six outstanding artists of the Caribbean by the Barbados Government at Carifesta in 1981, made an Honorary Doctor of Letters by the University of the West Indies in the 1980's, she has given the people of Jamaica a belief in excellence, and by her disciplined work put psychic strength and power in the Jamaican and Caribbean peoples.

Edna Manley was one of the editors of the outstanding Jamaican magazine **Focus** and she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters by the University of the West Indies. On one of her visits to Guyana, Edna Manley was a guest at the Seymour home. We sat on the open verandah facing north and as she looked towards the Atlantic, just over a mile away, Edna was moved to remark on what she called the “enormous skies of Guyana.” I realised that what she was referring to was the fact that in Kingston, always a mountain somehow seems to be in sight, whereas in Georgetown this was not so.

**Kyk-over-Al** is happy to carry in this present issue, a comment from Edna Manley remarking on the high quality of the Golden issue of this magazine, which also presents one of her lectures.

Edna Manley was one of the great women and artists of the Caribbean and has had a profound influence on us all.”

— AJS

## THE GUYANA PRIZE

On a happier note, we are pleased to record the announcement of **The Guyana Prize** by President Desmond Hoyte in his address to the nation on Republic Day. President Hoyte announced the Prize in these terms :

“Generally, when I speak to you, I speak of ordinary matters which concern us in our everyday life. I try to explain what the Government is doing to improve our conditions of life — how we feed ourselves and families, how we educate our children. I talk about the problems of transport and water and electricity supply and health and employment and take-home pay.

And this is as it should be. Most political and economic effort in any society must be concentrated on satisfying the basic, everyday needs of ordinary men and women and their families. A nation must as a fundamental priority feed, clothe, house, educate and provide employment opportunities for its people.

However, man's needs do not end there. There are other needs that we must not forget, however hard the times are. The flowering of intellect, the appreciation of beauty in literature and music and art, the development of man's creative imagination are important — and must be seen to be important — in any society worth a name in the world. Such things may sometimes seem luxuries, especially at a time when countries like Guyana are being buffeted by economic problems of every sort. But they are not luxuries. In their own way they are as essential to the development of the whole man and the whole citizen, as food and physical health are at a more basic level. Material prosperity, even material self-sufficiency, is not enough. Human beings cannot and should not be so easily satisfied. Certainly, I would not wish that Guyanese should ever be satisfied only with material progress.

I have felt for a long time that we should be doing more to encourage and celebrate good writing in Guyana. There is a long tradition of outstanding writers in Guyana's history. We should seek to nurture and extend that tradition. More than that, however the encouragement of good writing has valuable spin-offs in society. It encourages clear thinking and clear expression and acknowledges their importance. And, may I say at once, there is no sphere of activity or endeavour in our society in which clear thinking and clear expression is not vital if success in solving problems is to be achieved. So it is not only good literature for its own sake that I feel we should celebrate — though that is important — but also recognition of good literature as a spur to making society as a whole aware of the importance of writing and the effective use of language. We must give stature and status to our makers of words as we do to our makers of things.

There are a number of ways in which we can do this. We should give more emphasis to the teaching of good writing in our schools. Despite the foreign exchange constraints we must bring in more books, especially books by Guyanese and Caribbean writers, so that citizens can read more widely. We must give more

encouragement and more funds to the National Library. These and other things I will be personally concerned to see achieved.

Today, however, I wish to announce a special celebration of good literature in Guyana. I have been persuaded and I have therefore decided that the time is ripe to establish a Literary Prize which I hope will serve as a spur to our best writers in the development of their creative talents. It is to be called The Guyana Prize. There will be awards, in the first instance, for the best collection of poems, the best fiction and the best first book of poems or fiction. The awards will be open to all Guyanese, resident in Guyana or living abroad. The details will be released later, but I can say now that the awards will be of substantial value.

Works will be judged by an independent panel of well-known Guyanese, Caribbean and Commonwealth literary figures. The first awards will take place in 1987 and at the Award Ceremony later in the year a distinguished literary figure will be invited as a guest speaker to mark and honour the occasion.

In developing this idea, I have been greatly assisted by some persons who are prominent in the field of literature and who, I believe, have shared my vision. I would like to pay tribute to them and let them know how very highly I appreciate the work they have done.

I have every hope that The Guyana Prize will over the years become established as an important literary prize nationally, regionally, and internationally. I hope that as the years go by it will help to raise the prestige of good literature in our national and regional life. I hope also that it will succeed in giving due recognition to our writers who, in their own way, are, after all, as important as our farmers, our industrialists, our teachers, our scientists — and even our cricketers !”

The details of **The Guyana Prize** are set out below :

## **OBJECTIVES**

To establish a prize for outstanding work in literature by Guyanese in order to :

- a) provide a focus for the recognition of the creative writing of Guyanese at home and abroad.
- b) stimulate interest in, and provide encouragement for, the development of good creative writing among Guyanese in particular, and Caribbean writers in general.

## **RULES AND CONDITIONS OF ENTRY**

### **ELIGIBILITY**

Published works of Guyanese nationals at home or resident overseas are eligible for submission.

Works must fall in any of the three named categories, and must have been published for the first time between 1st June, 1985 and 31st May, 1987.

## **CATEGORIES**

The competition is for works in the following three categories :

- a) Poetry — a collection of poems or one long poem by a single author.
- b) Fiction — a novel or collection of short stories by a single author.
- c) First book of creative writing :— Works as at (a) and (b) above.

## **AWARDS**

Category	(a) Poetry	US\$5,000.00
„	(b) Fiction	US\$5,000.00
„	(c) First Book	US\$3,000.00

There will be one prize awarded in each category.

## **ENTRIES**

- a) Only works submitted by publishers will be accepted.
- b) Publishers will submit works published between 1st June, 1985 and 31st May, 1987.
- c) Manuscripts, typescripts, proofs etc. will not be accepted.

Publishers are requested to submit six (6) copies **gratis** of each title entered in each category in the competition.

## **ENTRY DEADLINE**

The deadline for the receipt of entries will be July 15, 1987.

Works received after this date will not be included in the judging.

## **LANGUAGE**

Works shall be in English but widely interpreted to include varieties of English.

## **JUDGING**

Winners will be selected by a panel of five (5) judges of whom one will be the Chairman.

The five judges will comprise three resident Guyanese, well-known for their work in this discipline and two persons of the same standing drawn from the Caribbean and the wider Commonwealth, the latter being nominated by the Commonwealth Institute.

Each entry will be read by at least three judges.

Judges should be in receipt of works submitted by July 31, 1987.

The short list of finalists will be announced in October, 1987.

The final judging will be done in Guyana in the 1st week of November, 1987, and the winners announced within three days of the Judges' meeting.

The decisions of the judges will be final and no correspondence on the results will be entertained.

Winners will be notified at an appropriate time and will be expected, as a condition of entry, to attend the Prize Award Ceremony in late November, 1987. Return airfares and other expenses will be provided where necessary.

## **PUBLISHERS**

Publishers are required to submit on a separate typed sheet the following information for each competitor :

- a) Entrant's full name, date and place of birth. Citizenship [by birth, marriage, naturalization (delete where not applicable)]
- b) Current address;
- c) Title of work submitted;
- d) Date and place of publication;
- e) Indication of whether or not the work is a first book;
- f) A brief biographical sketch and career resume of the author, together with a recent black and white photograph.

## **SUBMISSIONS AND ENQUIRIES**

Entries for this competition, and all enquiries must be addressed to :

The Guyana Prize Management Committee  
c/o Vice-Chancellor  
University of Guyana  
P.O. Box 10 1110  
Georgetown  
GUYANA  
SOUTH AMERICA

## **NOTES**

1. A Guyanese is defined as a person who was born in Guyana, or who has acquired Guyanese Citizenship.
2. A Publisher is defined as one who produces copies of books etc. and distributes them to book sellers or to the public. Private publishers are included in this definition.
3. Awards will be paid in the currency of the country in which the prize winner resides.

## CONTRIBUTORS

- Harold Bascom — Guyanese novelist and short story writer; Heinemann published his first novel **Apata** in 1986; lives in Guyana where he is also a well known illustrator.
- Frank Birbalsingh — Guyanese; senior lecturer in Caribbean Literature, York University, Canada; important promoter of West Indian writers.
- Stewart Brown — Poet; painter and print maker; editor of anthology of West Indian poems **Caribbean Poetry Now**; lives and teaches in Wales.
- Mahadai Das — One of the leading "new generation" of Guyanese poets; at present studying in the U.S.A.
- McDonald Dash — Prominent Guyanese journalist; playwright and producer; contributed to **New Writing in the Caribbean**, 1972.
- John Figueroa — Jamaican poet, anthologist, short story writer and educator; was Professor of Education, U.W.I.; has taught in Nigeria and Puerto Rico and now lives, lectures and broadcasts in England.
- Ras Michael Jeune — Guyanese performance poet; has published small collections of his work including **Black Chant**.
- Tony Kellman — Barbados poet and short story writer; has published three collections privately; **The Black Madonna and other poems** (1975); **In Depths of Burning Light** (1982); **The Broken Sun** (1984).
- Pamela Mordecai — Jamican poet; radio and TV producer; editor of **Caribbean Journal of Education**; has written many books for children.
- Rooplall Monar — Poet and short story writer; lives in Guyana; Peepal Tree Press has published a collection of short stories **Backdam People** and a volume of poems **Koker**.

- A. L. McLeod — University Professor of English Literature in American Universities; has been in correspondence with AJS for a decade; an authority on O. R. Dathorne.
- Sasenarine Persaud — Guyanese author of short stories and poems; work not yet collected.
- Dr. Jeffrey Robinson — Senior lecturer in English at University of Guyana; noted literary critic.
- John Rollins — Senior lecturer in Theatre Division of Creative Arts, U.G.; Chairman of Theatre Guild; Director of plays for Theatre Guild.
- Andrew Salkey — Noted novelist and anthologist of Jamaican descent; poet; prominent writer of children's books and radio plays.
- Jan Shinebourne — Guyanese writer resident in the U.K.; her novel **Timepiece** was published by the Peepal Tree Press in 1986.
- Nandwatie Singh — Professional engineer who also writes short stories and occasional journalism; lives and works in Guyana.

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