

No. 37



**KYM-
OVER-
AL**

DECEMBER 1987

Poetry Mark McWatt, Ras Michael Jeune, McDonald Dash,
Sasenarine Persaud, Mahadai Das, Pamela Mordecai,
A. J. Seymour, Ian McDonald.

Theatre Joel Benjamin, Jeremy Poynting, Frank Thomasson,
Ron Robinson.

Articles Alan Persico, Frank Birbalsingh, Nesha Haniff.

Review A Goodly Heritage (Elma Seymour).

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Kyk 37 - Edited by A. J. Seymour and Ian McDonald

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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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OVER THE EDITOR'S DESK

THEATRE ISSUE

A major part of this issue of **Kyk-Over-Al** consists of articles on the theatre. In the old series of **Kyks** published in the period 1945 to 1961 there was an excellent tradition of writings on the theatre. We would have liked to have reproduced some of these pieces in this issue - not only because of their intrinsic significance and excellence but also because of the fascination there is in comparing thinking on the subject then and thinking now. Unfortunately any such abstracts either would have been too short to do justice to the whole or would have monopolised too much space. However, for the sake of interested researchers, we note that important pieces on the theatre appeared in **Kyk** Nos. 1, 6, 10, 11 and 12 and that issue 25 was devoted entirely and most interestingly to the theatre. We also note that the **New World Fortnightly**, that beacon of enlightenment which appeared in Guyana for a time in the 1960's, contained excellent articles on the theatre in issues 24, 25 and 26. Perhaps the time has come now for an effort to be made to write the first "History of Theatre in Guyana". Can the money be found to commission someone like Ken Corsbie or Al Creighton to do the job?

MAHADAI DAS

With deep sadness we report the serious illness of Mahadai Das, young and most promising Guyanese poet, who for the past few years had been living and studying and writing poetry in the United States. In May this year she was taken ill and hospital tests indicated Endocarditis (an infection of the heart, in this case the mitral valve). Heart surgery was planned but before it could be done a piece of the infected material broke off, embolised in the bloodstream, travelled to the brain, and caused a stroke. The stroke caused speech, memory, and motor impairment. Her mitral valve has been replaced using open heart surgery and, after post-

operative care, she was transferred for therapy to the Chicago Rehabilitation Centre at Northwestern Hospital.

As a foreign student in the U.S.A. Mahadai lacks both the social support and financial resources which play key roles on the long road back to full recovery. A *Friends of Mahadai Das* group has been formed to help. Because of the legalities involved in setting up a formal fund-raising mechanism, the group asks that donations be made by cheque or money order in the name of Mahadai Das. Donations should be sent to "Friends of Mahadai Das", Box 16202, Chicago, Illinois, 60616, U.S.A. We hope for, and look forward to, her complete recovery and to publishing many more of her poems in future.

POETRY IN SCHOOLS

The following broadcast in the Viewpoint series on Guyana radio represents the deeply held views of the editors of Kyk and, we hope, all lovers of literature.

I have said before, and will keep on saying until the cows come leaping over a blue moon, that there is nothing more important in society than teaching the growing generations to express themselves in good, clear, concise, forceful English. For the individual, such a skill is a tool whose usefulness lasts throughout a lifetime. For the nation, a highly literate population not only inspires enlightenment and preserves culture but also is a tremendous asset in economic development. And yet, in recent times, trends in examination results and the evidence of interviewing first-time applicants for jobs indicate that our school system is beginning to produce a flood of barely literate citizens. It is desperately important that measures are taken to turn the tide.

However, today I want to go a step further and make the case not just for putting much more emphasis on the teaching of English in schools but, beyond that, for more and better teaching of poetry. I realise that there must be a great majority who see such a suggestion as highly impractical, not to say slightly mad, at a time when the national emphasis is on science, agriculture, useful trades, and everything educational that might lead in future to economic growth and multiplying the Gross National Product. It will be asked why should the teaching of poetry find any place at all in an educational system devoted to hard, practical,

bread and butter development.

I believe there is an answer to this. Fundamentally it comes down to the fact that what distinguishes human beings more than anything is their use of language. And poetry matters profoundly because it is a central example of the use human beings make of words to explore and understand all experience. Poets work at the frontiers of language. They are deeply engaged with the struggle for clarity and meaning. Because they wrestle with and refine language in order to be lucid they are, in the most crucial sense, guardians of the accumulated richness of our written and spoken inheritance. And if a nation forgets or neglects such an inheritance its soul soon dries up, however great its material success.

Poetry needs to be at the heart of teaching English because of the quality of language at work on experience that it offers to children. If language becomes separated from moral and emotional life - if it becomes just a trail of clichés or a parade of dull practicalities which fail to quicken and excite the mind of the reader - then we run the risk of depriving children of the full vital resources contained in language which poetry provides. As Ezra Pound pointed out long ago, literature, among other things, is a way of keeping words living and accurate. It is the essential place of poetry in English teaching to restore to pupils a sense of exuberance and vitality and excitement and passion in the acquisition of language and in the power and savour of words.

Books are scarce in Guyana, and books of poetry scarcest of all. Yet I hope that the well of poetry will never be allowed to dry up in our schools. There are, for instance, two

excellent recent anthologies - **The Penguin book of Caribbean Verse in English**, edited by Paula Burnett, and **Caribbean Poetry Now**, edited by Stewart Brown, published by Hodder and Stoughton in London, both of which should be in all our schools. If children at an impressionable age could be introduced to such books by dedicated teachers the love of poetry would never die.

The latent talent for self-expression in any child is immeasurable. Recognition of this should be at the heart of reading and teaching poetry in schools. The dull learning by heart of set poems is not teaching poetry. Children must be shown into the heart of poems. They must be encouraged to read poetry as a pleasure, as if a poem was indeed, in George Herbert's phrase, "a box where sweets compact'd lie". And they also should be encouraged by the teacher's own enthusiasm to express them-

selves in poetry. This working at the frontiers of language, the insight children will be given into all the possibilities of language, will do them eternal good.

Given the circumstances in Guyana's schools today I imagine this will all seem like some elitist dream, a plea for something that is crazily impractical. But I profoundly believe those in charge of our educational system cannot and must not take this view. Encounters with poetry act, in the words of Franz Kafka, "as an ice-axe to break the sea frozen in us". Through poetry properly taught children find their own originality in the dignity, resources, and uses of language. In this way they can themselves begin to make better sense of the world in which we live. If literature is the expression of a vital human dimension then the experience of poetry should not be a matter of chance but of entitlement.

BIM NO. 70

AJS writes:

A copy of BIM No. 70 (December 1986) arrived on my desk. It is a well-produced magazine of 102 pages, with poems, stories, and an index of value giving facts on what was published in the last three issues. Looking wistfully through the contents, and leafing through the pages, what attracted my attention was the old names known to me. For example, A.N. Forde, a former editor of BIM, back in Barbados after ten years in Geneva; John Figueroa has two poems in this issue; and Errol Hill, now Professor of Drama in U.S.A., has a tough analysis of "calypso and war". John Wickham, the editor, acknowledges the financial help of the Organisation of American States in coping with the inflation of the last year.

One of the special features of the magazine is the article on French Creole in the Caribbean which comes from the pen of a member of the University's French staff, and indeed takes pride of first place in the contents. Perhaps even more scholarly is a meditation on Shakespeare's play *Othello* and a fascinating African source *A Geographical Historie of Africa* written by Leo Africanus and translated into English by John Pory in 1600. The article is entitled "Parallels between *Othello* and the Historical Leo Africanus" and is blessed by more than four pages of notes.

Excellent and informative reading lies in these pages.

THE NEW VOICES, NOS. 29/30

AJS writes:

I have received a copy of *The New Voices*, March - September, 1987, Nos. 29/30, edited and published by Anson Gonzalez. This is a journal for the promotion of creative writing, founded February, 1973. And this issue is dedicated to the President and People of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of Independence 1962 - 1987.

This is a huge double-issue of more than 200 pages, with 22 poems, 10 stories and 4 literary essays. As the editor points out, he is celebrating 15 years of introducing new Trinidad writers and this issue projects 13 new poets, 4 new fiction writers and 3 new essayists. He has had difficulties of many kinds, particularly in advertisements, but he is happy over donations of prizes, supplies, postage and equipment, cover-designs, and coverage by the print and electronic media. He acknowledges the support of many, including the names of the editors of *Kyk-Over-Ai*. He very warmly mentions his daughters and his wife. He is particularly happy over the rise of women writers - nearly 50% of the poetry in *The New Voices* is the

work of women.

He uses statistics - 150 poets contributed 370 poems; 25 fiction writers contributed 45 stories and 33 non-fiction writers contributed 80 pieces. So in 15 years *The New Voices* has added considerably to the literary culture and archives of Trinidad and Tobago. And he hopes that one or two of the writers "nurtured in these pages will gain international recognition and prestige at the Commonwealth and even Nobel levels". This issue contains riches of several kinds. For example, the way Jennifer Rahim was awarded the special scholarship prize of \$500.00 to assist her in her final year of study; the Creative Writers Association of the Cave Hill Campus of the U.W.I.; the quotation from Eric Roach of the "ungovernable brilliance of islands"; the review by Jeremy Poynting of Shiva Naipaul's last novel. Especially recommended is Anson Gonzalez's editorial on *Poetry and National Development*. It stresses the power of imagination and the use that can be made by the elites at all levels of quotations by national poets (and nearly ten of them are named).

JOURNAL OF WEST INDIAN LITERATURE

We welcome most warmly and with profound congratulations the appearance of the *Journal of West Indian Literature*. The first issue appeared in October, 1986, and the second in June, 1987. It is a publication of the three Departments of English of the University of the West Indies and is published in Barbados. It is a scholarly Journal dedicated to the critical examination of West Indian literature.

The editorial in the first issue has some interesting words to say about the use of the term "West Indian":

To those who might be unhappy with the term "West Indian" in the journal's title, either because it perpetuates Columbus's mistake or because it is 'inaccurate' or potentially confusing, I can only say that most of us who are ourselves "West Indian" have no problem with the name; besides it is almost impossible to find a satisfactory alternative. To say "West Indian literature" in different words and with the same precision would require something like "the literature of the English-speaking Caribbean (including Guyana)", and if you stick "Journal of" in front all that you will appreciate the problem. In any case the 'accuracy' of the name is not really dependent on the specific meanings of individual words or phrases. I submit that referring to the literature of the English-speaking Caribbean (including Guyana) as "West Indian literature" is no more inaccurate and no less readily understood than referring to the literature of the United States as "American literature". If you remain

The editor of JWIL is Mark McWatt and submissions, books for reviews, enquiries and subscriptions (US\$15 per annum - 2 issues) should be sent to: The Editor, Journal of West Indian Literature, Department of English, University of the West Indies, P.O. Box 64, Bridgetown, Barbados.

THE 3RD WALTER RODNEY MEMORIAL LECTURE

We recently received a copy of *Creative Schizophrenia* - the Third Walter Rodney Memorial Lecture delivered by Dr. Michael Gilkes in December, 1986, at the Centre for Caribbean Studies, University of Warwick. This is a fascinating lecture and should be read by anyone interested in West Indian literature.

The subtitle of the lecture is *The Caribbean Cultural Challenge*. Dr. Gilkes, Guyanese Senior Lecturer in English at the University of the West Indies (Cave Hill campus), is at present the Leverhulme Fellow at the Centre. His publications include *Wilson Harris and The Caribbean Novel* (1975), *The West Indian Novel* (1984), and *Couvade* (A play, 1975).

Walter Rodney (1942 - 1980), perhaps the outstanding scholar - activist in the Black Diaspora of the post-World War II era, was brutally killed in Georgetown on June 13, 1980. Walter Rodney published *A History of the Guyanese*

unconvinced, glance for a moment at the figure sitting on the journal's back cover; Anancy is our emblem, our device - Anancy who, according to Edward Braithwaite,

Squats on the tips

of our language

black burr of conundrums...

"West Indian literature" might then be considered an Anancy conundrum, suggesting the ironic strategy of that timeless trickster: the simultaneous revelation and concealment of identity. Another reason why it is appropriate that Anancy should squat on the cover of JWIL is because, as Braithwaite also reminds us, the spider-God is a type of the West Indian artist, associated with the complex vision and the difficult, devious craft that produces West Indian literature:

black iron-eye'd eater, the

many-eye'd maker,

creator

dry stony world-maker, word-breaker,

creator...

Working People (1881 - 1905) in 1981, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa in 1972, Groundings with my Brothers in 1969, and A History of the Upper Guinea Coast (1545 - 1800) in 1970.

THE GUYANA PRIZE

In Kyk No. 36 we were pleased to carry the announcement of the inauguration of The Guyana Prize for literature. The 1987 competition is being judged by a panel consisting of Ian McDonald (Chairman), Dr. A.J. Seymour, Dr. Eddie Baugh (Professor of English, U.W.I., Jamaica), Jonathan Barker (Poetry Librarian, Arts Council, U.K.) and Dr. Annette Rollins (Head of the Department of English, University of Guyana). At the time of writing the judges have just announced a shortlist of candidates for Fiction and Poetry as follows:

The Fiction shortlist is:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. "APATA" | - HAROLD BASCOM |
| 2. "CARNIVAL" | - WILSON HARRIS |
| 3. "DELE'S CHILD" | - RONALD DATHORNE |
| 4. "FRANGIPANI HOUSE" | - BERYL GILROY |
| 5. "TIME-PIECE" | - JANICE SHINEBOURNE |
| 6. "WHOLE OF A MORNING SKY" | - GRACE NICHOLS |

The Poetry shortlist is:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. "GUYANA MY ALTAR" | - MARC MATTHEWS |
| 2. "ISLANDS LOVELIER THAN
A DREAM" | - CYRIL DABYDEEN |
| 3. "KOKER" | - ROOPLALL MONAR |
| 4. "MAMA DOT" | - FRED D'AGUIAR |
| 5. "MANGOES & BULLETS" | - JOHN AGARD |
| 6. "YEARS OF FIGHTING EXILE" | - MILTON WILLIAMS |

Published works by Guyanese appearing in the period 1st July 1985 - 30th June, 1987 were eligible. We hope the winner will be announced in time to be printed "stop press" in this issue of Kyk. We believe that the successful launching of The Guyana Prize is a good augury for a much deeper and richer (in all senses of the word) involvement by both private and public bodies in the encouragement of literature in the nation. We also have the hope that The Guyana Prize will soon be extended to cover works published by all Caricom citizens.

THE PRINTING OF KYK NO. 37

From this issue Kyk is typeset and composed on a Macintosh micro-computer, with camera-ready output by a computer-driven laser printer. Conventional offset printing is then used for the rest of the production.

This process will allow Kyk to use illustrations, and in other ways to grow faster than would otherwise have been possible. In this new beginning we must record our thanks to our previous letter-press printers, Autoprint Ltd.

REMEMBERING ANNA REGINA

Threaded by the main road
like a bead of time
and tied to my memory of place
- - Anna Regina: I made love in haste
and left you, beside the cherry tree
blown with dust
and salt from the stale atlantic.
Now in this vault of absence
I recognize again your face
so coldly come to claim.

The ache of half-remembered wounds
dominates the dialogue;
the birth of obsession in patterns
like flesh and bone:
the circumcision of childhood fears
to mark them as my own
for ever -- strange how every knife
returns after all the years.

My mind then was the property of another,
crown land or church land or mortgaged
to the madam caretaker of the resthouse
with her rice lorries droning round the bend
in conspiracies of dust:
she laughed when she locked you in my room
for my fingers, drunk with cherry wine
were in rage for such a reaping.

I remember I had wanted
a more personal vacancy
- space for the dismembering of dream
to occupy in freedom:
but arms encircled me
and flesh burned with royal privilege
I stood alone on the peak of my longing
And uttered the farthest cry from victory.

Now you are with me again
Whenever dusty roads
Are suddenly perfumed with rain;
In cherry wood -
Whenever axes sound
(my heart, these days, is closer to the ground).

These experiences I harvest
I have loved them and become them all
And I place you, another careful pearl
on my necklace of the world.

Why then this pain is memory
this urgency? Are you in danger somewhere?
And must I save you?
Or (most painful of all)
is it you
Who hunger to save me?

RIVER PASSAGE

From the landing at Red Hill
I launched myself
into the river's clouded side.

My movement was a shudder of love she had known before,
the flash on top-rock, lip, the bending of light
into womb-flesh fire, mould of gods;
and the white tail of spray
flicking magically
into the caves of night-birds,
extinguishing their stars.
Flying hooves of stone
struck the restless bosom,
churned the surface foam
clinging to her ankles like a child. . .

She buoyed me out of love,
that ancient memory,
and I knew her again
as a vein of conquest, swollen like the tide,
throbbled within me.
On the other side an ancient tree
stood, its leaves had turned to gold.

2

In the beginning
was a boyhood impulse

to flaunt the knowledge of rivers:
I too must cross that waterfall
now and forever, my climax evolving
into depths of sun,
discovering inchoate earths
molten beyond magic
and musical notes like soft marbles
-- cock's eggs of dawning --
I roll in my hand,
pitch into the black bowl
of space. "See, see my spheres, Mummy,
hear them hum."
Electric kites obedient to my finger
tethered through infinite chords of love.
Only the boy's riot of desire
could reverse all the given,
could make the waterfall its own finger of fire
exploring the faces of stone
and faces beneath the faces.
A boyhood impulse--
and what is language
to contain my dream?

3

Reality dawns differently,
disguises the dream
like clouds of the face of the river

The repeating arc of my body
supported me in her window of the sun
but her depths of cruel cold
fingered my nakedness
-- part of the mystery she unfolds.
Her place of granite and her place of sea-shell
are roots of the self-same arc
across which she bears my body.

(Nearing the eye-infested Carib sea
I feel her Viking reins
tightening the flow,
loading the arc with poison-arrows
while she lisps of love)

I dance for her,
proud of my initiate energy,
in this mid-brothel of the stars. . .

Half-way house
and a drifting cloud of leaves
sprouts the slim neck of a *labaria*
I am among the river's dead
waiting for the bubbles
to take me into the third coming of light.

A purple seed of the *Itae* palm
knocks against my head,
its flesh bitten and torn
and sweet with the rot of rivers:
I opened to my beloved...

But there was only a clue in time
a cypher in space,
a tail toward the end of the race
where grey glances at another
furnish only
grey images of self.
The world a hell-mirror
and all events consumed
in the demonic nervous tick
at the heart of nothing.
Object beseeches object
with a voice that is my own;
hands cover faces
hiding the hours of day and night,
dissolving the language.
Dissolving the language.

Without the language
there is not the dream
only the mirror's carrion vision.

5

Inside-out
and the rebirth of light
is her cruellest cave
behind the waterfall;
face below the rock-face
visible at last
in the embryonic stars of the night birds

Then daylight
cruel as love.

(Within a reflection of rolling clouds
I strode past the savannahs of the south
loud with their sand-paper trees.

"Whose hills are those?"
they may well have asked,
but I was dumb
with a freight of unclaimed love.

Since I stepped off the brink of continent
and exchanged my granitic certainties
for these sea-shell rumours of support,
I have seen my conquest
become death,
my laughter stiffen into the beat of clocks,
and the straight paths of the world become a devious maze)

7

The great folds of sandstone
greet the awakening eye
and wink
as the fluttering pettycoats of streams
sway in and out among the villages
hoping to catch the eyes of boys,
idle at play,
dreaming the water-passage
and the arc of love.

And among them there is one
picking golden leaves by the side of rivers,
and we know, you and I,
He has come to free us all.
Out of the darkest cave
He has come to free us all.

MARK MCWATT

KLICKITY KLACK

When last you see the city street
looking so sweet?
It really hard on them aching feet
but when last you see the city streets
looking so sweet?
Young thing; old thing; Old time some-
thing in a come again shot
parch nuts, cigarettes - ital pot
George town pavements looking real hot.
Klickity Klack, Klickity Klack along long line
by the ice cream shop
another long line by the gasolene spot-
Klickity Klack, Klickity Klack.
Since the gasolene shortage lots of
stretch jeans in town
shoemakers, sweet sellers are all
around.
Klickity Klack, Klickity Klack
shoe-heel and pavement. all two knock.
Klickity Klack Klickity Klack
thousands typefaces on a letter press block
tapping out history, living out the facts
Klickity Klack, Klickity Klack
get in on the news, get in on the facts
Klickity Klack, Klickity Klack.

12.30 and the cinemas all sold out
with the blackout at home
where hungry faces sit glum
it is better in the 12.30 to come
where chinee and yankee make you live out their life
story
buy parch nut, buy cigarette,
'two balls and a puri'
spend the five dollars or twenty but
hurry
blackmarket your ticket; four dollars
for house
seven dollars balcony
three hours from reality in New York or Chinees
Klickity Klack, Klickity Klack
letter-press faces type out the facts
Klickity Klack, Klickity Klack
shoe-heel and pavement all two knock.

Not everybody walking up and down
the city. Some cool out on the pavement
with a tray and 'nough stocks
foreign biscuits, foreign toffees
foreign chocolates and bubble gum packs
accumulating money
the whole city is on attack
grandmothers, grandchildren
old and young it's a fact
Klickity Klack, Klickity Klack
shoe heel and pavement all two knock
and the sound that they make like
a letter-press block
printing out history as they live through
the acts

A old time police-man, he done murder a
youth,
now awaiting investigation
runs a footwear booth
He sits on the pavement with lots
of foreign shoes
barefoot children passing, digging
no blues
young sweeties walk by in ones and twos

Young girls take over the whole Georgetown scene,
the gov't uniform is lemon and green
in every sidewalk crowd they bright up the scene
with nice firm legs
holding promise between
and an innocent look like a virgin queen.
Klickity Klack, Klickity Klack
Water St, Regent St, the Arcade or Bourda
Green
thousands of touching bodies whispers
fulfilling dreams
a taxi-driver eye-up a woman right
pon she pants seam
he han full of twenties if you
know what I mean

'Panties' 'Brassieres' 'Corn-Curls' they shout
buyers and sellers moving about
outside public beer pubs

lots of Guinness stout, twenty dollars a
bottle that you lift to your mouth
then sit on your motor-scooter
ride your fancy clothes about.
Not everybody got money, some got
to tout. At the taxi stand
not a taxi going South.
Everybody get vex and start run up they
mouth.

Parchnut in glass cases with electric light
Gary on Cambell Ave selling
cigarettes day and night
everybody hustling a dollar cause
things well tight,
the school ent have school girls
once they body get ripe.

Klickity Klack, Klickity Klack
Money, Money, Money,
hustling is fact
Klickity Klack, Klickity Klack
Sex and money
and be happy you're black
even coolie people them
caught in the attack
they selling out culture to full
a money sack
A pandit get caught in a cocaine trap
Klickity Klack, Klickity Klack
Georgetown 1987 under cultural attack.

Klickity Klack.

RAS MICHAEL JEUNE

S U N S U D D E N L Y

Orangey, purply-grey
Suddenly
The swanning sun settles
Behind the courida
Across the river
Beyond the Chimmey at
Wales

To rise in golden fire
Elsewhere
in a myth and a reality

Suddenly
the dusk is the doom
of memories of a
brighter time
of promises
that were like a
sunflower morning

Into the Polder and
beyond
To somewhere
The sun soars
Like a silent swallow
seeking

Suddenly
Memories brighten
in the noonday shadows

As the mounting monarch
of the morning
lusters above the
shingled City
As promises sparkle
to disappear
In the gloaming of the
orchid twilight

Is the myth and
the reality
Money and promise
Somewhere
Elsewhere
Beyond the courida
Beyond the chimmey?

The sun is the
only sun
The dark of the
sun
tells the doom
of the brighter time

MCDONALD DASH

RAIN STORM

This rage of waterangels
On zinc
Occurs when clouds touch
River.

The rotten gutter spews
Disintegrating jets
Of silver water
Crystal spinning droplets

Into the
Murky river
Bares her frothy
Underwear at thunder touch.

There is God and
You
In every drop
And droplet
Every liquid touch
And touchlet
Every streak of lightening
And every slap of thunder.

Sees you and God
And I
Melt into each other.

SASENARINE PERSAUD

BONES

Jangling queer music,
grotesque jewels, they hang
In my closet beside prom dresses
and my red pumps.

When petticoats are sleeping
they continue to jangle.
They make strange noise.
Sometimes moonlight, sometimes shadow
falls upon their gauntness.

Sometimes, fringed vells around them
are too thin. Sometimes, both my pumps
and my brogues are blind to their cries.

They could tell a tale.
They want a say, without doubt.

Long ago, they were supply fleshed.
But then, all the meat fell away
from the bone. Some teeth
and some hair remained.

Someone should examine their story.
After all, it's not that they dwindled
into dust altogether. Besides,
these bones here could make more than music.
They're a fire-tried instrument
for an uncomposed song.

They have no wish to stay in the attic forever.
They want to be part of the world.

Oh they are hungry for wind to sing
through their tissue, so hungry.
They wait for the earth at the plough.

After winter's fallowness
and all its severity,
when the earth is torn up
by the diligent farmers,
when the golden seedlings
begin to offer their love to the heavens,
they wait without praise or reprimand.

So when these white flutes
send a note out, a golden apple
from the Mexican border - it takes to the air,
full shape, and rises like a helium balloon
climbing forever.

Exhume the golden rags
and well-preserved harpsicords.
It's time to play
in the golden symphony of summer.

MAHADAI DAS

GENESIS

Whorf knew; Sapir too
the bard going on
about his rose
didn't have a clue

his mis/take - though
he meant well - was to
confuse essence
with smell

Descartes said that
thought is being; Berkeley
"You get what you
seeing"

But any decent
bureaucrat could've
cued Bill in to
where it's at

To be born
is to be named
that world is word
can't be disclaimed

Besides which R
Burns makes the case
delivers us
the coup de grace

Consider the
emotive power
of "O my Love's
Like a Cauliflower"

PAMELA MORDECAI

TWO LOVE POEMS

I

I think of you
And bells begin to peal within my heart
Telling a bubbled and contralto tale
That started long ago
And will be silent only in my death.

Fountain of music in the bursting bells
Like bells of Hato Rey,
Lifting and turning, shaping arabesques
In liquid architecture

I think of you
And bells begin to peal within my heart

II

I love your voice
It patterns silver music on the night

I love your mind
It whirls and dances in a waltz with mine
In a perpetual rhythm

I love your lips
That wake my senses to a trembling tumult
Where every music softly sweetly sounds
And I transformed

Your body I love
Its hills, and peaks and parks and heady fountains
A memory of Eden made alive

THAT MY SON BE KEPT SAFE

My small son burns with fever,
His whole body is furnace hot,
Burning to death he seems.
"I'm so sick, Dad", he'd said,
His eyes beseeching me to help.
Now his eyes are closed,
His dark lashes long like mine they say.
His breath rasps hard and dry.
It is agony to hear it.
To touch his brow stops the heart.
The doctor, stone-faced, stern-browed:
Though we try to catch a saving glance
He will not watch us in the eyes.
My wife smoothing the bed, doing anything
Anything to help, to keep busy,
Trembles with fear. I tremble equally.
It is the worst fear in the world,
Fear of sadness beyond all sadness.
God forbid this should befall:
All the years that pass
Would not cancel out the hour
Why are we constructed so?
Were it not better to be a stone?

I remember times we watched him,
Coming to his bed because we could not hear his breathing.
When most gently sleeping
Was the most anxious time:
Bending low and lower to catch the breath
Just raising the small chest.
The slightest twitch of coverlet or ribbon
Showing he was safe among the smothering pillows
Was most sweet, most easing
Of this fear we all have always
That they will die and leave us
No hope at all, the rest of life made senseless.
Oh! No ransom can ever meet this threat.

He burns to death
And my whole self cries to heaven.
For him to keep safe
I would vow it now
To be good in God's sight always, always:
Good father, good husband, good man,
Christ's good soldier even.
Though rum's still sweet
And friendship's fine, and laughter,
And a girl's walk catches the groin
And the world is so beautiful
And the wonder of every minute never ceases
I would give it all away forever
To let his eyes not close, my God,
That my son be kept safe.
And if God will not listen,
If God stops his ears,
So that my small son be saved
I would make a pact
With the hobgoblin in Hell
Who loves sudden misery,
Who strikes when life is most fit,
To give all my gold,
Give blood-health, body-tune, eyesight,
The touch of wind and water that I love,
Memories I have of tenderest hours,
Reason that controls all things
That life God gave me,
The immortal soul,
I would give all away
Should my son be safe now:
Safe now, my God, my God!

IAN McDONALD

THE EARLY THEATRE IN GUYANA

by JOEL BENJAMIN

Any attempt to examine the early history of the theatre and drama in Guyana must be preliminary, suffering inevitably from limitations of known sources. To a large extent one must rely on newspapers and the occasional remarks of commentators on the society at large. Official records are silent in this area. This dearth is greatest in respect of the activities of those social groups which exercised no official power. It would, however, be wrong to assume that the only significant tradition of the theatre or drama was essentially European in form, although this paper will not attempt any significant examination of these other traditions. These in themselves are worthy of much more serious research.

There is reference to Chinese theatricals being given for the first time on the 1st November 1877 in Georgetown (Long 196-: notebook A-C), and one might assume that these had special place during festivals. The Portuguese in the nineteenth century made ample provision in their intellectual and social life for entertainment. Established musical bands and at least one dramatic society are evidence of this (Menezes 1986: 130 - 133).

In this category of non-establishment dramatic activity is the brief but interesting account relating to East Indians given by Bronkhurst (1883 : 389). He states that the immigrants held regular theatrical exhibitions as a form of amusement, where the deeds of the deities were portrayed in night-long sessions. Bronkhurst further tells us, with undoubted prejudice, of the "pernicious and mischievous effect upon the morals of the spectators, especially the young, of both sexes" which was created by many of the scenes. These performances were apparently held throughout the country, and specifically on plantations like Enmore, Great Diamond and Farm, as well as in Georgetown. In addition to Bronkhurst's account it is interesting to note (even though this falls outside our period of treatment) that the British Guiana Dramatic Society was organised by East Indians. It was very active during the 1930s and 1940s and even published a drama journal.

The earliest recorded account of theatrical performances in Guyana from around the year 1800, comes from Bolingbroke (1947 : 26-27):

Strolling players from North America occasionally visit the West Indies. Twice during my six years' stay they came to Stabroek, having previously made a tour among the islands. The company consisted of but four or five persons; they had chartered a vessel at New York; they had embarked a cargo of canvas palaces and painted forests, of crowns and daggers, sceptres and chains, of the purple attire of majesty, and the motley foppery of folly. At Grenada and Barbados, they had unpacked their portable theatre, and had been received with an applause, which was re-echoed from the continent. The admission was two dol-

lars for each representation, and public curiosity detained them nearly three months. The plays of Shakespeare require so much show and so many actors, that we had often to be content with select scenes. The simplicity of the ancient drama was restored by the economical criticism of the manager. It might be wished that plays like those of the Greeks and French were written for the services of these cruising players: such simple compositions would better suit the rude state of their dramatic system, than the complex works of English art and refinement. In the French islands, negro performers have been enlisted to take parts in the maritime companies; but there are few Moorish characters on our stage, except Othello, Juba, and Oroonoko, which they could personate with propriety. In an illiterate community, which can only learn through the ear, the drama is an important engine of instruction, and might be rendered essentially conducive to historic and moral information, and even to the civilization of the vulgar and undisciplined.

The Theatre Royal

It would appear that the establishment of the first fixed place of theatrical entertainment was at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This was linked to the history of the Union Coffee House in America Street. A coffee house near the stelling was recorded in June, 1796, as being licensed to a Mr. John Bodkin (Rodway 1920 : 17). It is known that a society called the 'Union' or 'Eendragt' was associated with a coffee house, although we cannot be certain that this was the one owned by Mr. Bodkin. In July 1805, a Mr. M. Campbell constructed a new building for the Union Coffee House, providing billiard tables, a club room and a hall which could be used for concerts, amateur theatricals, balls, meetings etc. In that year there is record of a subscription concert in this building, and one might suppose that theatrical performances were part of the general fare at that point in time.

Rodway (1892 : 71-72), whose study of the origins of the Union Coffee House is important, is most likely wrong (if not contradictory) in his views about its location in 1805. He suggests that it was at the south west corner of America Street and the Avenue of the Republic, on present day lot 18 of New Town ward. (In reality he uses the words 'south east', but one could regard this as an obvious slip as no such corner exists). On the other hand he tells us that:

Mr. Campbell offered the Coffee House for sale in June 1806 describing it as that well known and faithfully built house on lots 7 and 8, front of Vlissengen, with the establishment of the Union Coffee House, his servants being excepted. It was two stories high, raised on brick walls of nine feet, having two fronts each, sixty feet long by twenty-six wide, forming an angle. Besides several large rooms, there were six bed-chambers furnished with bed-steads, beds and mosquito nettings. Then came a number of out buildings and sheds, stable and dwelling

house, all new and of the best materials.

Lots 7 and 8 Vlissingen front would, if the numbers have remained constant, in fact be an area taking in the northern part of Longden Street (8) and the lot immediately to the east (7). (Longden Street was not built until the latter part of the nineteenth century).

It is conceivable that the confusion over the location of the first theatre could be resolved by the suggestion that, around 1810, the Coffee House (as separate from the theatre) was moved to a different site, possibly the one at the south-west corner of America Street and the Avenue of the Republic. It is conceivable that both were moved to this location. Lending support to the first suggestion is the notice (*Royal Gazette*, 11th December, 1810) which deals with a cancellation of a ball at the 'New Union Coffee-House'. This would have been the building shown in a Bryant print (1824 : 60/61). Most probably this became the New Victoria Hotel, subsequently functioning as a temporary court-house and government offices.

Whatever the problems over identifying the definite location, it is known that it was the large room in the Union Coffee House which was fitted out as the 'Theatre Royal'. As Rodway (1891-94: iii, 242-243) elsewhere writes:

The first "Theatre Royal" appears to date from 1810, Mr. GOEPEL being then proprietor. In the *Gazette* of Jany. 2nd of this year, that gentleman announced that it had been fitted up at considerable expense, and would be let as a concert or ball room. The pit and stage had been made into one room, floored flush, bounded on three sides by elegant transparencies, paintings and decorations, lately finished by an eminent artist. On the 13th of February, it was announced that Mr. G. R. GARD had bought it, and in August following, that gentleman petitioned the Court to grant him and HARRY FEAKE AYSHFORD, the *exclusive* privilege of conducting Theatrical amusements in the colony, which was refused, a general license only being granted for three years. Mr. GARD said he had raised the Play House in front of Pln. *Vlissingen* to its then state for the amusement of the public, and had unavoidably been led into heavy expenses for scenery and dresses &c.

The *Essequibo & Demerary Royal Gazette* records in its issue of the 24th February, 1810 what were probably the first performances of this new theatre, viz. the tragedy of *George Bramwell* and the farce *The Anatomist*, on Thursday the 22nd of that month. These items, according to the reviewer, were performed "we understand in a very unexceptional manner and much to the satisfaction of the audience, particularly the after-piece, - during the performance of which the house was in one continued roar of laughter and applause".

It would appear that the group which initially ran this theatre was called the 'Gentlemen Amateurs', but in reality it functioned as a professional one. The device for making money was to advertise each show as a 'benefit' for an individual in the group, and presumably the takings went to that person. Advertisement of shows was by handbill and newspaper, though it is only after August 1810 that the latter form seems to have been used extensively. Indeed the use of

regular newspaper advertisements was not too dissimilar to what obtains nowadays in the case of the cinema, and handbills for the latter were quite common some years ago.

After its grand beginning in February 1810, the local theatre does not seem to have been too active, for it was "re-opened" later in August that year with the arrival of a professional company (*Royal Gazette* : Saturday, 11th August, 1810). One is able to read in that newspaper (Tuesday, 7th August, 1810):

It is with much pleasure we congratulate the Public on the arrival of the COMPANY OF COMEDIANS from Barbados, who we understood are come to display their Talents on the Demerary Stage, and thereby dispel the dullness which has so long existed with regard to Public Amusements. That they will receive all possible encouragement and indulgence from the Public, we have not the least doubt, as it is generally understood that they were favourites with the Public of Barbados, and accordingly were much enticed to remain amongst them. And certainly much praise is due to the Managers of our Theatre for their endeavours to render the Stage more perfect than it was, for whatever merits the *Gentlemen Amateurs* might have possessed, yet it must be acknowledged that their want of *Female* Performers, certainly was of a nature both unnatural and disgusting.

The *Royal Gazette* (Saturday, 11th August, 1810) also tells us that this professional company performed the *Castle Specter* and the *Purse* under very favourable auspices to a totally packed house. The writer of the article, however, adds, "We shall reserve our strictures on the performance until we shall have had a further opportunity of becoming acquainted with the talents of the respective Performers".

It would appear that Joshua Bryant, later known as the author of the first illustrated locally printed book (*Account of an Insurrection of the Negro Slaves in the Colony of Demerara* (1824)). either was involved in the original design of the Theatre Royal or arrived in the company from Barbados as a scene painter. Bryant stayed in Guyana, making his living as an artist and actor.

The theatre advertised its opening (with local performers) on the 16th October, 1810 (*Royal Gazette*, Saturday, 13th October, 1810), indicating that handbills would be distributed on that day. The first fully advertised performance after the reopening is to be found in the *Royal Gazette* of 20th October, 1810 :

THEATRE ROYAL

On Tuesday Evening, the 23rd October
1810, will be performed

For the Benefit of Mr. Gard,
Colman's Celebrated Play called
THE MOUNTAINEERS

Octavian	-	Mr. Gard
Saul	-	Mr. Burke
Violet	-	Mr. Vijdag
Killmallock	-	Mr. Hewit
Roque	-	Mr. Freeman
Lope Tocho [?]	-	Mr. Hewit
Bulcazin Muley	-	Mr. Jones
Garren	-	Mr. Freeman
Ze ... yde	-	Miss M. Shaw
Fioranthe [?]	-	Miss Shaw
Agnes	-	Mrs. Shaw

Muleteers, Goatherds etc. Messrs Burke, Vining, Freeman, J. Shaw, & c.

After the Play will be Sung by Mr. Vining, Freeman,
Braham's much admired "Polacca."

Also the celebrated Duet in *Paul and Virginia*
by Mr. Vining and Miss M. Shaw

TO WHICH WILL BE ADDED
The Musical Entertainment of
NO SONG NO SUPPER

[With names of performers similar to above]

What is interesting about this advertisement is that it shows that there were some women on stage at this period, not so long after the accusation of presenting the 'unnatural' practice of males performing female roles, and that actors had to take double or multiple roles on occasions. From October 1810 onwards the Theatre Royal worked apace. Doors were generally opened at 6 p.m. and shows started at 7 p.m. The plays, along with the incidental entertainment, changed almost every week. In a review (*Royal Gazette*, 27th October, 1810) one reads of the performance on the previous Thursday of the play *A Cure for the Heartache*, along with *Latherno* and *Petruccio* (presumably farces).

In the advertisements of that newspaper between October and November 1810, one reads also of the following shows:

- 27th October - *The Point of Honour* (play), songs, and *The Poor Soldier* (musical farce).
- 3rd November- *The Honey Moon* (play) and *Agreeable Surprise* (comic opera).
- 6th November- *The Wonder: a Woman Keeps a Secret* (comedy), songs, and *The Honest Thieves, or, The Faithful Irishman* (farce).
- 10th November- *The Busy Body* (comedy), and *The Deaf Cover* (farce).
- 17th November- *The Blind Bargain or Hear Him Out* (comedy), songs, and *Raising the Wind or How to live Without Money* (comic

- entertainment).
- 20th November- *Beaux Stratagem* (comedy) , a song and *Children in the Wood*.
- 24th November- *The Carmelite* (tragedy), songs, and *The Irish Widow* (entertainment).
- 27th November- *Richard the Third* (tragedy) and songs.

The form of the entertainment, with a great stress on comedy and burlesque, and with the usual untruthful advertisement of 'favourite', 'celebrated' and 'popular' plays and farces, reminds one today very much of what takes place in relation to the cinema. Shakespeare's *Richard the Third*, however, must have been something of an exception, as it was still running on 16th December of that year. The speed of production of new plays, given the fact that these almost invariably were five-act ones, would appear at a glance to be indicative of truly remarkable memory and ability on the part of the actors. In fact, such a rapid turnover was necessary, given the limited population which could provide audiences, and possible simply because the performers read from scripts during the plays. We are told, for example, in a review (*Royal Gazette*, 27th October, 1810) that Miss Shaw was "the best reader and the most accomplished performer" among the local actors.

The history of the Theatre Royal after 1810 still has to be properly researched in detail, but clearly it was active for a while, experimenting with everything that would capture an audience. We read, for example, of a concert with vocal and instrumental music (*Royal Gazette*, 26th February, 1811). In March of 1817 the Theatre Royal had become the venue of an "Astronomic" exhibition. The price of admission was more moderate, with front boxes at eleven guilders, back boxes at six guilders, pit at eight guilders and children at half price. Something unseemly must have happened at an earlier performance at the playhouse, for we read (*Royal Gazette*, 13th March, 1817) that "Mr. Bowles assures those Ladies and Gentlemen, who will honour the Exhibition with their attendance, that means have been adopted to prevent a recurrence of any indecorous or improper behaviour, which served so considerably to distress the representation on a former evening".

The advertisements for 1817 indicate some new features of this theatre. Importantly, all the performances were now "by permission of His Excellency the Governor". The military band of the 60th regiment invariably constituted the orchestra with the consent of the Commanding Officer. Finally, the actors had all changed since 1810; inter alia, the names of Mr. Bowles, Mr. Lanquet, Mr. Pemberton, Mr. Webster, Mrs. Pemberton and Mr. Joshua Bryant now appear. Bryant appears to have been something like a co-manager of the theatre at this point of time. (*Royal Gazette*, 31st May, 1817). The entertainment is more or less similar to that of 1810, with a mixture of plays, farces, miscellaneous items, songs and an afterpiece. These miscellaneous items occasionally seem to approach extravaganza. One is told, for example, of 'a grand display of fencing, by two eminent masters', of ballet, and Mrs. Pemberton's dancing on different occasions of her 'celebrated MEDLEY PAS SEUL' and a Spanish bolero. The performances do not appear as regularly as in 1810, and one reads of a season for them. The larger intervals between plays would suggest that these professional

actors were, in some cases, memorising their parts. In one instance, the management apologises for putting on substitute plays owing to the illness of Mr. Bowles - something which also supports the assertion that plays were not always read.

The Theatre Royal must have had problems of fraud either by patrons or staff. A footnote to an advertisement (*Royal Gazette* 2nd August, 1817) reads, "The necessity of taking checks on exhibiting Tickets of admission, or paying cash at the doors; also of delivering them to the persons appointed, is respectfully intimated". By August 3rd, tickets had to be bought beforehand, and no money received at the doors.

The interlude entertainment of October 9th is interesting in that it indicates that not every piece chosen for performance was composed abroad. Mr. Franklin was billed then to perform a number of comical or satirical sketches around the theme of hobbies. Included in these sketches one finds some that evidently demonstrate a more local talent, e.g. 'The Demerara Hobby'.

In 1818 no performances are advertised, suggesting that the Theatre had again run into the doldrums, or had no licence.

Handbills for plays presented by the *Hollandsch Liefhebbery Tooneelgezelschap* (Dutch Amateur Dramatic Society) in 1826 still exist. This was probably the original name for a local group of Dutch amateurs, and a serious one at that, as the elaborate nature of the advertisement indicates. The plays are both advertised for production in 'The Theatre', presumably the Theatre Royal. In the *Royal Gazette* of 1828 and up to May 1829, no mention is made of the Theatre Royal.

A Later Theatre Royal?

The New Town fire of the 27th December, 1828 comes into the story at this point. The reports of the extent of this fire are contradictory, with the *Royal Gazette* (30th December, 1828) stating that the stelling and the row of houses along the south side of the Vlissingen sluice canal had been destroyed, and the 1832 *Almanack and Local Guide* asserting that the whole of America Street had been burnt down. What is certain, however, is that the Old Court House survived. As mentioned earlier, this had been used as government offices, and had probably been on the site of the New Victoria Hotel. What this seems to imply is that the Theatre Royal was no longer functioning, at least in the New Town area. Support for the first suggestion would seem to be indicated by the fact, as will soon be seen, that a new theatre had to be built by the Dutch amateurs.

Richard Schomburgk (1953 : 35-36) writes in the 1840s :

Among the buildings that ought to satisfy a spirit in search of amusement, both theatres take first place. The first was built in 1828 by subscription amongst several Dutchmen fond of the stage[. . .] The second was established as a private speculation whither North America incites its Thalian youth to cross the expanse of ocean in order to fan again, or continue aflame the taste for dramatic Art now dead or dying in British Guiana.

Schomburgk's statement seems to suggest that a commercial theatre of some sort had been constructed after the Dutch Theatre. It would appear that the Theatre Royal, in the form it took up to the 1820s, was abandoned, demolished or re-sited. Significantly Rodway (1920 : 142) refers to the 'first Theatre Royal', thereby giving a measure of support to this thesis. A manuscript work of around 1831 gives a clear description of the then existing theatre, one that was evidently quite different from the one which is known to have existed over a decade before (Holmes c 1831 : 27):

Theatrical amusements were never much encouraged in Demerara, the wet season, or heavy* rains generally intervening to disturb ordinary arrangements. At present they appear to be wholly on the decline, as the Barbados company, who were in the habit of visiting this colony a few months in every year, but rarely make their appearance. The theatre itself is a very poor apology for the name, being little better than a low barn artificially fitted up for the reception of an audience, besides which it is inconveniently situated in the outskirts of the town; the approach lying over roads, which in wet weather are a total exclusion to all pedestrians.

In the *Colonist* newspaper (2nd January, 1861) there is mention of a grand fancy ball at the Theatre Royal, Main Street. Either way, if one is correct in the supposition that there was a new theatre, this building does not itself seem to have survived beyond 1863. In this respect Cameron (1950 : 84) would most likely have been unintentionally referring to the Theatre Royal in one of its forms when he states:

I came across, in the Royal Gazette of December 31, 1863, mention of "an edifice containing all the appointments necessary to effective presentation of optical and dramatic entertainment." The writer of the article in a question referred to the fact that the building no longer existed and that since then there had been no local theatre similarly equipped. I do not know whether the reference was to the Athenaeum which was founded in 1851, but the Athenaeum Club and the Philharmonic Society were among our famous cultural institutions of the past.

Neither the Athenaeum nor the Philharmonic Hall would seem to fit the description - the former was more a club room which was used for occasional shows, and the latter certainly did exist as a structure after 1863.

The Theatre Royal in New Amsterdam

As with the introduction of printing, Berbice does not appear to have been too far behind Essequibo and Demerara in the erection of its first theatre. This was also known as the Theatre Royal, and it was in New Amsterdam. The first advertisement located so far for this theatre is in the *Berbice Gazette*

(Saturday, 6th February, 1813) where one is told of the fabulous rope tricks to be performed by Signor Arisi, along with a proposed dance of his "with two eggs under his feet [sic] without breaking them". A clown show and the pantomime *Harlequin Skeleton* were added. Significantly it is stated here that, after this performance, the theatre would be opened every Saturday. No plays are recorded, however, in the *Berbice Gazette* for either 1813 or 1814, but another Arisi show with a different pantomime is mentioned.

In 1817 there are full records of this theatre. On the 22nd January of that year, with the permission of the Governor, and for the benefit of Mr. Franklin, the play (?) *The Review, or the Ways of Windsor* is advertised along with other entertainments. The actors are mentioned as Mr. Stewart, Mr. Aarons, Mr. Smith, Mr. Abrahams, Mrs. Smith and Mr. Franklin. Franklin's name (if the same person) appeared also on the Georgetown stage around this time. One sees again advertisements on the 29th January of a play, farces and comic interlude, and on the 1st February of extracts from some of Shakespeare's tragedies, along with a farce and singing. On Saturday, 22nd March, 1817 a concert of vocal and instrumental music with a grand masquerade and ball are mentioned. The theatre was itself selling dresses and masks for the purpose.

Not too much is known of this theatre, or even its precise date of construction, though one might suppose that this came shortly after 1810. Its ownership is not yet known, and it is tempting to believe that its operations had some connection with the Theatre Royal in Georgetown. Its physical arrangement can, to some extent, be guessed at. From an 1817 advertisement (which informs us that the prices of both front and second tiers of seats were at eleven guilders, with children at half price) it is possible to conclude that this theatre did not have the elaborate interior arrangement and facilities (balconies etc.) of its Georgetown counterpart. Its equipment, however, was not so crude as can be seen in the *Berbice Gazette* (Wednesday, 26th March 1817) where, with the hint that this theatre was closing down, one is told:

TO GENTLEMEN AMATEURS!

TO BE SOLD, --- A most complete and valuable set of Scenery, Machinery, Dresses, and Decorations. ----300 Plays, and Farces, Music. ---- In short every article necessary for furnishing a private or charitable Theatre, equal to any establishment of the kind in Europe. --- Likewise a Phantasmagoric, (made by Mr. Scott, Strand, London), with a complete Set of Figures, painted by the most celebrated Masters . ---- A few articles of every Superior Furniture, a pair of bronze figures and cut glass Chandeliers, Shells, &c.

The above articles will be sold on the lowest terms. Enquire at the Theatre. 15 March.

Of course, the fact that a proper theatre was constructed at a certain time would not necessarily imply that theatrical performances were then started in New Amsterdam. It is almost certain that, as with Georgetown, private buildings were the sites of plays and concerts. Of significance here would be the advertisement

(Berbice Gazette 26th March 1814) of a concert of vocals, featuring a professional British singer, on private premises at lot 21 of the town.

The Minor Theatre

The third recorded theatre in Guyana was called the Minor Theatre. The Royal Gazette (Tuesday, 15th January 1828) contains the following advertisement:

MINOR THEATRE
(Late Royal Hotel)

By permission of His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor, Mr. Belshaw respectfully informs the Public, that he will open the above Place of Amusement on Monday next, the 21st of January - when he hopes for a renewal of that patronage and support, with which on former occasions he was so highly honoured.

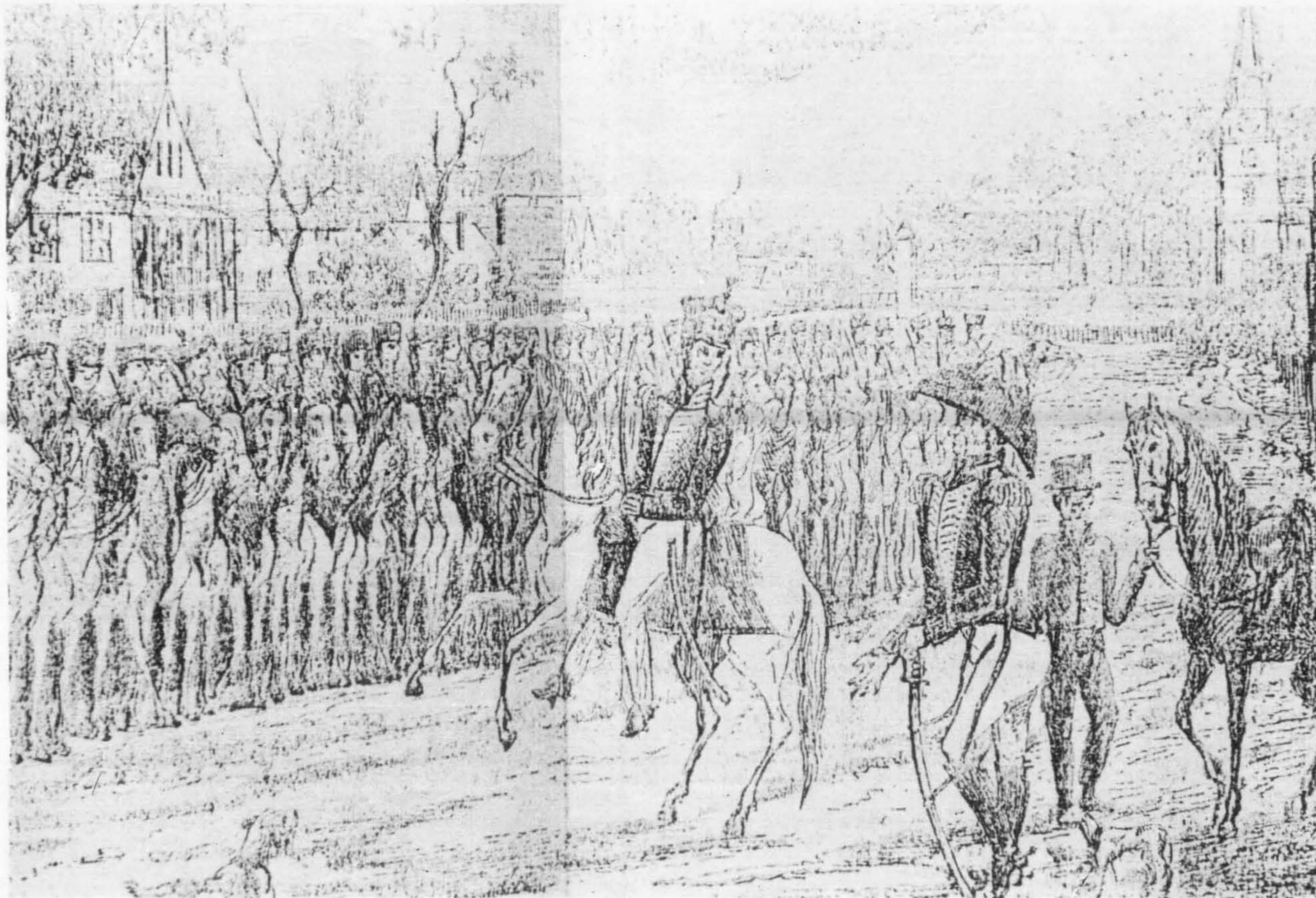
The Performance will commence with the loyal and moral Burletta of *FANCY'S MEDLEY; or, The Union of the Rose, Thistle, and Shamrock*, in the course of which will be sung, a variety of new, fashionable, and appropriate songs.

The advertisement further indicates that a Russian dwarf and the Italian Scaramouch (Burgami) would appear. To all of this would be added the pantomime *Harlequin's Flight to the Moon; or, The Three Old Women Weather-Wise* with incidental fireworks. Tickets were to be sold at six guilders apiece. Until the full research is done, nothing more can be said about this theatre. It was possibly intended for children. The advertisement is interesting in that it suggests that Mr. Belshaw had been in the theatrical business some time before 1828.

The Royal Hotel, the place of this theatre, is shown in an illustration by Joshua Bryant (1824 : 2/3), and appears to have been on, or near to, the northern part of the site of the present Supreme Court building.

The Dutch Theatre

An amateur theatre, referred to variously as the 'Dutch Theatre' or the 'Amateur Theatre', was erected in 1828 for the purpose of private theatricals by subscription of certain Dutch gentlemen (Almanack 1832 : 15; Richard Schomburgk 1953 : 35). It is tempting here to believe that the Dutch-speaking section of the population could not understand or appreciate the performances of the English actors, and thus had all motivation to provide their own entertainment at the theatre. As stated before, these amateurs probably went under the Dutch name of *Hollandsch Liefhebbery Tooneelgezelschap*. The theatre was situated at the corner of Charles and Broad Streets in Charlestown, and it is



THE ROYAL HOTEL

The Royal Hotel in Georgetown is shown to the left.
(From Bryant, 1824).

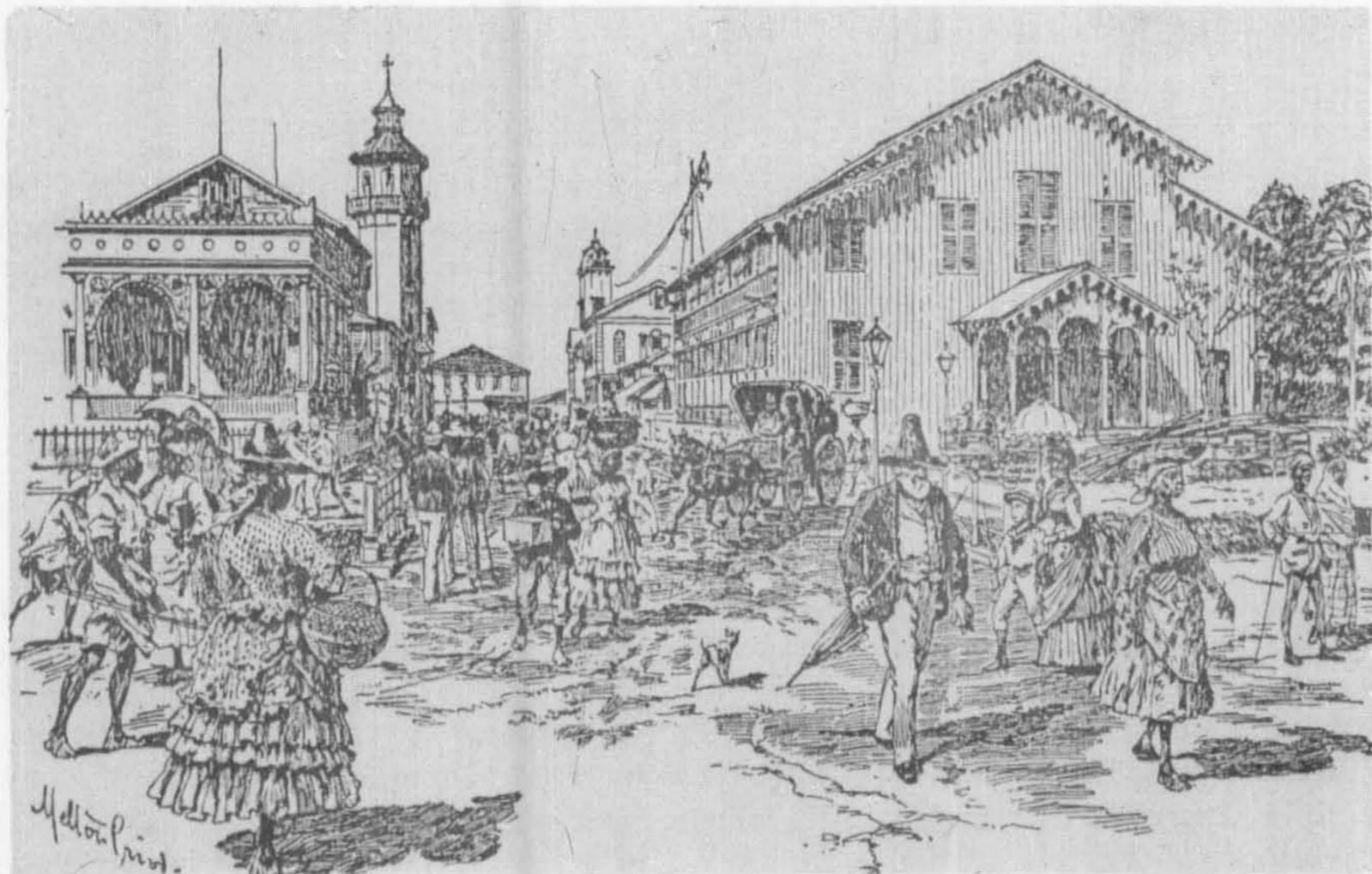
clearly marked on an 1841 map of Georgetown (**Local Guide** 1843). It would seem that, not too long after 1828, the amateur group fell apart, and the Dutch Theatre passed into private hands, surviving on the occasional concerts, plays and general shows by amateurs and professionals (Robert Schomburgk 1840: 75). According to Richard Schomburgk (1953 : 35) the "hobby in theatre" had become boring, and the building in his day "could remain quite empty were not a concert to fill its spacious flooring occasionally".

The later fate of the Dutch Theatre is well documented. It was sold to the Church of England in 1845 and, temporarily, licensed for use as a chapel, known as St. Philip's Hall (**Guyana : 100 years of service** 1967). In 1851, it was converted into a theological College called, 'Bishop's College', and in 1853 it was used as a training institution for schoolmasters; it was purchased (as indicated in ordinance 16/1876 dated the 3rd February 1877) by the Government in 1877 for the purpose of training teachers for the primary schools (**British Guiana Directory** 1877 : 315 and 1880 : 145; Long 196-: notebook S-Z (Theatre)). Luke Hill's Georgetown map (c 1907) shows part of this site as lying within the precincts of a police station. (Rodway (1920 : 142) states that the building was occupied by the Department of Science and Agriculture in his day, but he may have been mistaken about the theatre's original location) The Dutch Theatre was more to the south west corner of the site occupied today by the Dolphin Government School. It is still possible to see the old brick bridge, entering from Broad Street, which probably dates from the time of its construction in 1828.

The Theatre in the Later Nineteenth Century

The interest in drama did not die with the demise of these earlier theatres. One reason for this was that there were a few other locations for theatrical performances outside of them. Rodway (1920 : 125) states that "there was generally a theatre kept up in one or other of the halls" and refers to Mrs. Betty Game's great room at the Colony House as one such place of entertainment. Presumably this included theatrical entertainment. (The Colony House was on the site of the present Supreme Court building). After 1850, a number of buildings, some with other primary functions, took over as places for theatrical shows. The Athenaeum (which appears to have belonged to the Athenaeum Club) was built in 1851, and it apparently provided the space for a number of plays.

Earlier in the nineteenth century there is a newspaper reference to 'assembly rooms' but nothing is really known of these. The famous Assembly Rooms, which housed the Georgetown Club on the ground floor, had "an excellent and commodious convertible theatre and ball-room" on the upper floor. (**Handbook of British Guiana** 1909 : 179). They were built in 1857 by arrangement with the Royal Agricultural Society. The Athenaeum Room which had been on the site (roughly where the present Bank of Guyana lies) was removed for this purpose (Rodway 1920: 112). (It would appear that there was another Athenaeum building which was taken over by the Government in 1860). Of the Assembly Rooms, Pilgrim (1967 : 35) writes, "The auditorium could seat about 700 comfortably and there were occasions when more than a thousand were accommodated by using the very spacious side verandahs. At the back of the main



THE ASSEMBLY ROOMS (c. 1890)

The building is shown to the right.
 (From; C.W.Eves, The West Indies (London, 1891).



THE PHILHARMONIC HALL

Now occupied by Guyana Refrigerators Ltd. (The upper story, with a few modifications, is all that remains of this old theatre)

hall there was a small gallery which could accomodate about 100 extra persons in cheap seats. The stage itself was large ... ". Unfortunately fire destroyed the Assembly Rooms in 1945.

The Philharmonic Hall, located at the corner of Hope and Water Streets, was built sometime around 1860 by Charles Cahuac orginally as a 'Bijou Theatre' (White 1913 : 70). It was to be the operational point of the Philharmonic Club which was essentially a musical society, but staged plays, musicals and light operas. Like the Assembly Rooms it also attracted foreign theatrical companies. It is claimed (McLellan 1942 : 55) that the sound effects of this hall were the best in the West Indies. Charley Cahuac, as he was known, had, according to White, "always bemoaned the lack of interest taken in real talent as compared with that manifested in dancing dogs or the like". The Philharmonic Club had agreed to pay Charley as owner of the property, a rent for the hall, but the club failed and he was left with "the precarious rents from occasional hirings" (Rodway 1920 : 142). In 1889 it was sold to Park and Cunningham as business premises (British Guiana Directory 1890 : 449). Today the building survives as the premises of Guyana Refrigerators Limited.

The Dramatic Societies of the Later Nineteenth Century

The availability of locations for theatrical performances, especially the Assembly Rooms, gave an impetus to drama in the country both in amateur and professional hands (Rodway 1920 : 142). In 1870, two dramatic groups, the Amateur Dramatic Club and the Histrionic Club are both shown in the newspapers as giving performances in the Assembly Rooms. The former club was restricted to Whites, and the latter to Coloureds (Rodway *ibid.*).

The shows do not appear to have been different from those earlier in the century, except in that they seem as a rule to have started at the later time of 8.00 p.m. The Amateur Dramatic Club is shown in 1870 as holding quarterly shows. On June 28th it advertises *Evadne, or the Statue* (tragedy) and *Diamond and Diamond* (farce); on November 19th it advertises *The Lady of Lyons or Love and Pride* and *Lord Dunderery*. The Histrionic Club, probably also producing quarterly plays, advertises for showing on July 4th (three days after a proposed performance of its competitor club) *Apostate, or the Spaniard's Hate* (tragedy), along with a comic song and *A Policeman boiled to rags* (farce). The name of the secretary of this club is given as J. Horatio Tull, and one is told of the prices of admission - dress circle at four shillings and back seats at two shillings. The list of societies at this period is not complete. One reads, for example, in the *Nugget* (9th March, 1889) of a musical and theatrical entertainment staged by the Georgetown United Dramatic Company. No more of this group is known.

In 1891 followed both the Demerara Dramatic Club (which was initially under the inspiration of Mr. J. Veacock, a master at Queen's College and an "ardent Shakespearian" (Rodway 1920 : 142)) and the Georgetown Dramatic Club. The former of these managed to get some women to go on the stage, and they both seemed to be able to produce a number of full-length plays annually and a variety of one-act ones on occasion. Of Mr. Veacock, White (1913 : 70) states:

These memoirs would be incomplete if I were to leave out the

late James Veacock, the greatest Shakesperean [sic] scholar that this Colony has even [sic] known, who could repeat almost all his plays without a book, it being a treat to hear him suitably delineate each character. His histrionic ability and elocutionary powers were of a very high order. He, with a few others, helped to build up and keep alive for several years the Demerara Dramatic Club, bringing out all the best talent, it being no uncommon thing to hear it said that such and such a play was better produced and staged than when done by some travelling company. Nothing was too ambitious for the D.D.C. to put on, as they spared no expense to get perfection; but for petty jealousies, the usual thing with amateurs, it might still have been alive.

The Demerara Dramatic Club, like the Amateur Dramatic Club before it, seems to have been exclusively for Whites (including Portuguese at a later date).

The original entrance fee was \$1.50 per annum with a monthly subscription of 60 cents - both exclusive sums at that time for the society at large. One is able to read of this society that, at least in 1898, the rules vested the power to elect members in the running committee (British Guiana Directory 1898 : 237); that female members who performed did not have to pay the monthly subscriptions; and that "a monthly entertainment is held in the Assembly Rooms to which each member is admitted without further payment, and is allowed to take three ladies, recitation and a one act Dramatic piece, consisting of musical pieces" (British Guiana Directory 1896 : 240).

The Demerara Dramatic Club must have had problems in it, for by 1898 a separate club, the Demerara Dramatic Company, is shown to be in existence. Some of the members (like H.D. Belgrave and R.D. King) were formerly officeholders of the Demerara Dramatic Club.

The Georgetown Dramatic Club (formed less than a month after the Demerara Dramatic Club) was of a different order, catering mainly for Coloureds (Cameron 1950 : 84). It had a club-room at lot 31 Camp Street which is between Croal Street and Brickdam on a site that was later to be used for the now destroyed Gaiety Cinema. Cameron states that this club offered membership to all racial groups in the country, but is not fully clear, however, whether he is referring to a later club by that name, or to the same one when its rules and philosophy had changed. It offered a more reasonable entrance fee of 48 cents and required a monthly subscription for acting members of a similar sum. Again, 'ladies are exempted from all pecuniary charges (British Guiana Directory 1892 : 218)

The Demerara Dramatic Club existed well into the twentieth century when other clubs like the Lyceum, the Three Arts and the Jerusalem Players seem to have made their appearance. (Cameron 1950 : 84 and Pilgrim 1967 : 35).

In the later nineteenth century, notwithstanding the obvious enthusiasm of amateur companies and the regular arrival of foreign ones, Georgetown was not able to support a theatre, much less one that appeared to rely on dramatic performances alone (Rodway 1920 : 142). Other uses of the halls were necessary. In the pages of the nineteenth and early twentieth century newspapers, one reads

regularly of those other forms of entertainment besides the regular and popular balls, e.g. :

- (1) A concert in the Assembly Rooms of the Alleghanian Vocalists and Swiss Bell Ringers (*The Colonist*, Wednesday, 2nd January, 1861)
- (2) A concert of the Eva Brent Opera Troupe (*The Colonist*, Friday, 8th March, 1861).
- (3) Vocal and instrumental concert by Martin Simonsen etc. (*The Colonist*, 28th January, 1861).
- (4) Entertainment by Gangero's Royal Yeddo Japanese Troupe at the Philharmonic Hall (October, 1878)
- (5) A performance of the Great Zuma - Zutka Co. at the Assembly Rooms in 1909.

All theatrical performances were not, however, of the grand public sort. Trollope (1860 : 179) refers to the statement in 1859 by a Georgetown woman to the effect that persons in the colony did not have a dull life (as compared with those in Britain), especially as they had such things as dances, dinner-parties and private theatricals to amuse themselves.

The European form of the theatre had its attraction for those who were outside of the dominant class in the country. During the late nineteenth century, schoolrooms and hired halls offered the venues for amateur dramatic performances, and for the creole society most of those would have been derivative from a European culture. One must even assume the likelihood that a derivative culture of the theatre would have been reflected in the repertoire of small dramatic clubs or commercial performing groups. Yet the story does not end here, for there is much evidence (particularly the activities this century of persons like Sidney Martin, Bill Rogers and Sam Chase) that a creole tradition of popular theatre was emerging by the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Theatre and Society

The theatre in the early nineteenth century was an important form of public entertainment. The high price (initially of one joe) made it something which was restricted to the better off Whites in the society (Rodway 1891/94 : ii, 245). Indeed, it is almost certain that the early theatres had audiences of Whites only, or Whites and Coloureds on different days. (It is known that Coloureds could only go and see Joshua Bryant's painted panorama of Georgetown on two days of the week when Whites were not there.) Slaves would not have gained admittance.

Inevitably, the theatre was to be the source of much gossip and anecdotes, and the object of criticism. Perhaps the earliest description of a visit to the Georgetown theatre comes in the writing of J.C. Swaving (1827 : i, 276). This interesting account relates to a period not too long after 1810 when Swaving was in the country as a manager or overseer of a Berbice plantation.

Towards evening we made our way to the theatre. The popular tragedy, Hamlet, was playing - for if half a dozen persons are not killed off, and blood does not gush over the stage, then the

Englishman gets no enjoyment. We paid a joe (that is, 22 guilders) per person for admission. The playing troupe consisted solely of German Jews, so that the female roles had to be filled by men dressed up [as women]. During the afterpiece a violent quarrel arose between the female singers and the orchestra. It came to blows. The bearded actresses hitched up the hems of their gowns over their haunches, revealing some dirty pantaloons, and began a regular boxing match. This was acclaimed with sustained applause and loud cries of *bravo! bravissimo* and was held to be the finest scene in the whole performance.

Amongst the important personalities who filled the so-called balconies was also to be found the predicant of Stabroek. Alas! A predicant in a theatre. "O tempora, o mores!", people will certainly declare here; but there was also a little Mrs. Predicant next to him! His wife and children would be suffering from cares and want in Holland [...] whilst the predicant here, on the other hand, would be consorting with a married woman, and openly could trail around this mistress in his fine carriage in the streets of Stabroek.

In respect of Swaving's statement, it would be interesting to note that, even in 1870, young men generally had to play the parts of women, and audiences were extremely pleased when a 'real' actress appeared on the stage (Rodway 1920 : 142). The taste of the English seems to have been some cause for comment by other groups. In fact, Swaving's early account of a quite ludicrous scene in the first theatre is repeated in 1896 by Neves e Mello, who was the Portuguese consul. He states (1896 : 2-3):

Here we also have two theatrical societies, the *Demerara Dramatic Club* and the *Georgetown Dramatic Club*, the latter giving two performances per month on a regular basis; their show is like that of all amateurs, with only the comic songs, which are much appreciated by the English, having some originality, even though they [the songs] should appear more appropriate to a circus than to anyone accustomed to the elegance and distinction of French theatre; a furled hat, a ridiculous coat grotesquely worn by the actor, who in his recitations uses the voice inflexions of a clown and the same jerky gestures cause wild applause, a great noise of heels and canes, another original English manner of applauding.

A more caustic observer, referring to the theatre audiences of the early twentieth century, makes a sweeping condemnation of viewing habits (White c1910 : 226):

Speaking of this Club reminds one - it is a digression - that the Demerara audiences are, sometimes, disconcerting. Many, especially of the blacks, seem to be highly delighted when the victim of the piece is enduring agony and torture. The sight of suffering, particularly mental suffering, tickles their risibles.

A similar effect is produced by solemn incidents. It is a striking instance of the juxtaposition of mirth and solemnity, in human nature.

The Playwriting Tradition

In writing about drama it would be of interest to note those dramatic works which, though not part of an indigenous Guyanese tradition, were based on a Guyana theme. Lichtveld and Voorhoeve (1958 : 236-237) refer to the impact of the 1763 Berbice Uprising on Dutch writers of the period. Specifically, mention is made of this in the foreword to N.S. van Winter's tragedy *Monzongo of de Koninklijke slaaf* (Amsterdam 1774), a play which appears to have been based on the theme of slavery in Guyana.

A. d'Azevedo's *A familia do Demerarista: drama de um acto original* (Funchal, 1859) is a play based on the theme of a Madeiran emigrant to Demerara who had returned to his native land. (Interestingly, this work was translated and performed in Guyana as a radio play in 1985).

Of course, there were locally published plays and musical dramas which were not much more than adaptations of foreign ones. Significant in this category is the local adaptation of Weber's romantic opera *Der Freischütz*. The title page of this work, which was published in 1875 in Georgetown, tells us that the text of the drama was "entirely re-arranged, and in parts re-written, with original additions, expressedly for Mr. Charles Cahuac". The author of these changes is, unfortunately, not now known.

In this tradition of adaptation is *Falstaff: a play in three acts, selected from Shakespeare's Henry IV* (Georgetown, 1893), which was specially arranged for presentation by the Demerara Dramatic Club. The arranger was J. Veacock, the president of that society. This was "a collection, with modifications, of those scenes in Shakespeare's Henry IV, Parts 1 and 11, in which the character Falstaff appeared". Walter J. Veacock is recorded as being the author of *Phileron: the tragedy of a poet soul, and a few other fragments* (Edinburgh, 1896). According to Rodway (1921 : 15), the work showed promise, but Veacock did not live long enough to bring out his latent talents. The relationship of W.J. Veacock to J. Veacock is not known. The work *Phileron* is best described as drama in poetic form.

Father C. W. Barraud, one-time master at St. Stanislaus (or the then Catholic Grammar School) deserves a special mention. He attempted to seek an international audience for his major work, *Saint Thomas of Canterbury and St. Elizabeth of Hungary : historical dramas* (London; New York, 1892). On the verso title-page of this book we are told, "These two plays, founded on the standard works of Fr. J. Morris, S.J., and the Comte de Montalembert, were written twenty years ago. They are now published on behalf of a small school in the colonies with which the writer is connected". The themes of these five-act plays, of course, have nothing to do with the Guyana environment, but Cameron (1950 : 85) holds that they could be considered to be the first in a local tradition. They were reviewed locally. It has not been possible to establish the full history of distinctively local playwriting, though one might suppose, if only from the evidence of other lost forms of Guyanese literature, that it could have gone back

into the earlier nineteenth century. (In this respect it could be noted that one copy each of the locally published *Falstaff* and *Der Freischütz* is known to exist today in the University of Guyana Library; and it is only recently that historians seem to have been aware that a Black-owned newspaper was published in the 1840s in Guyana).

Timehri (Vol. 3, Pt. 1, June, 1884, p. 153) gives a very brief review of a book which apparently contained what is the earliest recorded indigenous play, viz. *Abassa : a play, and poetical pieces* (Georgetown, 1883), written by someone who signed himself as 'W.M.E.P.' From the account given in the review, it is possible to speculate that 'W.M.E.P.' was Egbert Martin, arguably the father of Guyanese poetry. 'W.M.E.P.' is described as a young creole of the colony suffering from a dreary illness, who had himself set the printing type for very small editions of this and another book. The review states that the theme of the work did not relate to Guyana as such. Indeed, the name of the play does suggest an African theme. Unfortunately more than speculation here is not possible, as no copy of the 197 page book is now known to exist.

Like *Abassa*, the book *Quid rides* (Georgetown (?), 1893 (?)) by the Rev. P. Giddings has no surviving copy. According to Cameron (1950 : 85) this work was a collection of about ten sketches dealing with the foibles of the people, "especially a tendency to use words of learned length and thundering sound"!

Short humour sketches, based on close observation of local life, seem to have had a long-lasting tradition in Guyana.

What we now know, however, of genuinely local plays (other than comedy sketches) is very limited, but there is all reason to suppose that, like *Abassa*, some attempts at writing on serious themes did exist even in the nineteenth century. Evidence of this tradition appears very sketchily in the early part of this century. Sidney Martin, known for his comedy sketches around the second decade of this century, is recorded (Tyler 1979) as having produced *Enery Swankey : a tragedy in three acts* (Georgetown : F. A. Persick, 19--).

The earlier indications of playwriting sometimes do not allow of easy categorisation. Rodway (1921 : 21) writes of a work which no longer exists:

I have a pamphlet "Guiana Dialogues", 1906, which is possibly an extreme specimen of the use of fine words misunderstood. It is intended for children's plays, and possibly some may have been acted in our villages. A single extract will probably be enough to show its character; a lover is begging for a kiss :-

"Arthur (*slow and pitiful*) -- Rebecca, thou earthly star of my life, thou whose fancy ranges no further than to me, thou whose beauty cannot be paralleled by any existing human soul, thou whose presence cheers the burdened heart, and illuminates the darkest home, thou whose eyes foretell merriment, whose ways are ways of uprightness, did I not perish on the mighty deep? Sought wealth when death appeared whilst crossing the Kaieteur Falls? When also in the interior of Berbice, I fought with a tiger, and was taken helpless to the New Amsterdam Hospital, disfigured by the paws and teeth of the animal? Was it not for your happiness? Revoke your resolutions and come into my loving embrace, thou pride of my life, and give me the kiss I

long for, come, come, my blue bells, come thou Guiana's star,
come, come, come."

" I wonder what idea of Kaieteur the writer had and what children could learn from such language.

The Coming of the Cinema

The connection between the theatre and the cinema is not too difficult to see. In many respects they are the same institution, except that the performances of the latter can be replayed at ease. The terminologies are the same ('balcony', 'box', 'pit' etc.), and we still go to see films at the 'theatre'. Yet, even though we have moderately active forms of theatre today, Guyanese theatre-going habits were profoundly affected by the arrival of the cinema in the earlier part of this century. The story of the cinema, however, deserves telling in its own right.

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AT HOMES, TAGORE AND JIVE

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND THE BRITISH GUIANA DRAMATIC SOCIETY

BY JEREMY POYNTING

The activities of the British Guiana Dramatic Society [1] illustrate several themes in the cultural history of Guyana; in the role of the arts in the formation of social identity, the relationship between ethnicity and cultural activity and the expression of one element of a complex Indo-Guyanese sensibility. For the first fact to be noted is that the British Guiana Dramatic Society, which existed actively between 1936-1948, was an exclusively Indian organisation. It permitted the non-Indian wives or husbands of Indians to be members (several of the group had returned from overseas with European wives) but coloured or Afro-Guyanese were not invited to join [2]. The society was by no means singular in this respect; the British Guiana Literary Circle and the Georgetown Dramatic Club were both wholly Creole in composition. Indeed, the B.G.D.S.'s offer to co-operate with the Georgetown Dramatic Club in a production of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* was rejected because the producer felt that Indians were 'not easy to work with'. [3] Even after the Union of Cultural Clubs was formed in 1945, Indian and Afro-Guyanese cultural groups had little to do with each other. *Dramag*, the irregular quarterly magazine of the society, reported that the Third Annual Convention of the Union had been the first time that the B.G.D.S. had presented itself to an audience which was not predominantly Indian.

The members of the society, which had a socially active core about thirty and an average of one hundred members, were the professional and social elite of Georgetown Indian society: Christians, Hindus, and Muslims united in their Indianness and their Westernness. The guiding lights were Dr. J.B. Singh (a leading member of the B.G. East Indian Association and a prominent Hindu) and his wife Alice Bhagwandhai Singh. Much of the social life of the group was focused on their home in affluent Queenstown. In its official existence it put on ten annual plays and regular concerts and reviews which were designed to bring images of Indian culture to a wider audience. There is evidence that they brought a considerable degree of professionalism to their productions. However, despite the enthusiasm and talent evident in the group, it produced little which was original. Its plays were either translations or adaptations from the *Mahabharata* (*Savitri* performed in 1929 and 1944), Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* and plays by Tagore such as *The King and Queen*, *Red Oleanders*, *Gora* and *Malini*. (The plays were in fact performed in May of each year to commemorate Tagore's birth). The only original, Guyanese play was *Asra*, performed in 1945. [4] Its authorship remained anonymous, though Basil Balgobin, otherwise known as a writer of comic short stories, was widely believed to have written it. Unfortunately, no script appears to survive but the reviews suggest that *Asra* was Tagorean in theme and style. The programme gives the following synopsis:

Harrichand, a wealthy merchant of Nagpur, is deeply distressed over the determination of his daughter, Neila, not to marry until she finds someone of her choice. He consults priests and reluctantly decides to hold a house party to invite several eligible young men for his daughter to meet. During the week-long house party much of the discussion centres around Asra, a mysterious person who through his writings has become the political leader of India. Neila's two friends, Sattia and Doolarie, who are at the party, fall in love with two of the guests. Neila too at last finds a lover. Who?

Apart from *Asra* with its predictable focus on Indian nationalism and the conflict between 'traditional' and 'Western' values there was nothing; when the B.G.D.S. offered a prize for an original play, only one was received and this was judged unsuitable either for prize or performance. This dearth of originality was not really surprising. The Georgetown group was concerned with India and Indianness, but ignored the India which was present in the rice villages and on the estates. The India they celebrated was gorgeous and mythical. (One may note the parallels in the contemporary plays of the Afro-Guyanese writer N.E. Cameron, whose *Balthasar* (1931) and *Sabuco* (1949) with their Hebraic and Ethiopian settings, exhibit a similar distance from either the real Africa or the Africa which was present in Guyana in syncretic folk forms.) Although some members of the Indian elite had begun to discover the estate workers and rural peasantry for political purposes, they had not yet begun to make any kind of imaginative identification with their lives, such as was made by Seepersaud Naipaul in Trinidad in the 1940s. The group was also perhaps too much of an inward-looking coterie and too self-congratulatory about their own social progress to achieve the detachment necessary for a dramatic or fictional exploration of their own lives. When they looked outside they sometimes seemed more concerned with continental India than the problems of Indians in Guyana. For instance, Dramag wrote in 1943:

One of our primary aims in these presentations is to awaken in this part of the world, a better appreciation for the culture and literature of India with the hope that it will tend to foster a better understanding of the many problems facing her and the civilised world...

It is possible that the plays of Tagore may have been seen as having a local relevance to the lives of the Georgetown elite in dealing with such themes as tradition and change or the right to choice in marriage. For instance, *Gora* is about the clash between a Hindu family who accept some Western ways and the fanatically orthodox and narrow-minded Gora. The play turns on Gora's humbling and discovery of a broader view of life. Yet how the plays were staged seems to have expressed an even more important message. Performances were designed to be spectacular; the playbill for Shudraka's *The Little Clay Cart* promised the 'gorgeous setting of Ancient India, beautiful Indian costumes and melodious songs.' The spectacle was there, one feels, to encourage the group's

confidence in itself and to make it clear that the despised culture of the plantation coolie was not that of the cultivated Indian.

They were though a group facing in different directions. Most performances included variety items - Indian instrumental groups, traditional dances, popular songs accompanied by piano and modern American tunes played by the 'Washboard Orchestra'. At concerts Samuel Massallal Pollard's Indian Musical orchestra (playing traditional instruments) rubbed shoulders with Miss Nalini Singh's popularly received performances as 'a jive and blues singer.' They were also trying to establish a secure and respected place within the local Euro-creole elite. Participation in the performing arts was self-improving as the aims of the group made explicit:

The British Guiana Dramatic Society stands for the moral, social and intellectual welfare of its members through the medium of music and drama. [5]

As a writer in *Dramag* of 1943 commented, 'being taught how to make myself agreeable in company' was one of the chief benefits derived from membership. On the other hand, the B.G.D.S. was also concerned with asserting its Indianness. The Indian community was informed of the glories of its past as an encouragement to its political confidence and self-esteem. Dr. J.B. Singh delivered lectures on Indian history and meetings were always closed with the singing of 'Bande Mataram' the India nationalists' anthem. However, the B.G.D.S. gradually began to see its activities in a Guyanese ethnic context. Though in 1942 *Dramag* had stressed that the group eschewed religion and politics 'or anything which tended to create a bias among the other communities,' by 1945 the description of the society's role is a little more assertive:

...the British Guiana Dramatic Society has taken upon itself the responsibility to bring to the cosmopolitan peoples of this country an appreciation of the grandeur of that civilisation of ancient India, of the continuity of which, with the possible exception of China, no region of the world can boast. [6]

The tone could also be more strident as members of the group defended the right of Indians in British Guiana to maintain their cultural identity:

We have experienced many attempts from without to absorb us as a distinct cultural group, and now more than ever, in our midst we find organised propaganda machinery at work, aimed primarily to plunge us into the general melting-pot towards a homogeneous culture... This we hate, and with a necessary hate. [7]

However, at the point where some members of the B.G.D.S. appeared to be facing up to the issues of cultural change and ethnic identity in a plural society, the group began to break up. It was clear that many of the older stalwarts of the group found themselves increasingly out of touch with the British Guiana of the late 1940s and the radical nationalism and socialist ideology which a group such

as the Political Affairs Committee was seeding. These social changes and the more political priorities of some of the group's younger members (including Ayube Edun, founder of the M.C.P.A.) in part lay behind the failure of the Society to establish the permanent theatre they planned, and the group's collapse. It was a loss. A leading member of the Theatre Guild admitted in the mid 1960s that it had produced no plays either by Indian or Indo-Guyanese authors or plays about Indians. [8] It was an absence of dramatic image that has scarcely been remedied yet.

It would be easy to characterise the B.G.D.S. as merely an Indo-Saxon group, an example of colonial mimicry, to see in its activities the desire of a new class for social respectability and recognition. There was perhaps an element of this in their 'at homes' and 'charades' and essays in the *Dramag* on 'Friendship'. And yet, the Naipaulian critique of mimicry implies form without substance, and that did not seem to me the whole truth when I met surviving members of the group and read, for example, the unpublished and fragmentary autobiography of Alice Bhagwandai Singh. It was evident that some of this Indo-Guyanese middle class group had possessed, in an unabsurd and self-liberating way, what they thought was the best of Western culture linked always to a strong sense of pride in their distinctive Indian cultural identity. Family legend has it that on her deathbed, in accordance with Hindu custom, Mrs. Singh called for a phial of water, brought not from the Ganges in India but 'Albion-Ganges' on the Corentyne. It was a symbol of the kind of gesture that the British Guiana Dramatic Society in a hesitant, often contradictory way, can be seen to have begun to make.

Footnotes

1. I am indebted to the late Dr. Hardutt Singh, who was an active member of the B.G.D.S., for much background information; to the late Mrs. Rajkumari Singh for making personal copies of playbills and magazines available to me, and to Karna Singh for access to other documents.
2. Rules (Revised 1942) *Dramag* 1942
3. Letter from Robert Adams to Dr. and Mrs. J.B. Singh (undated)
4. It was only towards the end of its existence that the *Dramag* published any original writing in literary genres, and this comprised only two very brief short stories, Jamila's 'Only the Brave' (a sentimental love story set in India) and Rajkumari's (Singh's) 'Sakina I love You Still' which deals with the theme of arranged marriage but is more notable for a careful description of an Indo-Guyanese wedding ceremony.
5. *The Dramag* April-June 1944.
6. *The Dramag* Special Play Number, 1944, p.3
7. *The Dramag* Special Christmas Number, Dec. 1945.
8. See *New World Fortnightly*, no 38, 1966, pp. 20-21.

DOWN MEMORY LANE

BY FRANK THOMASSON

In the first issue of KYK-OVER-AL in 1945, Norman (NE) Cameron briefly recorded the history of drama in Guyana in the 100 years up to that time and Joel Benjamin covers the 19th Century in this issue of KYK.

The June 1959 issue of KYK was entirely devoted to theatre in Guyana and in his Introduction AJS wrote:

It is heartening to see the way in which over the past two or three years, from a virtual standstill the theatre movement (in British Guiana) has blossomed.

This blossoming must be attributed to the formation of the Theatre Guild in 1957 by Bertie Martin, Lloyd Searwar and Arthur Hemstock. A very mixed trio by any standards who, whilst not always singing from the same lyrics sheet, nevertheless first put the act together and in the process consumed, I am told, considerable quantities, not of rum, but of Liebfraumilch wine.

Part of their dream was to have a theatre in Georgetown and that dream eventually came true on July 4th 1960 when the Theatre Guild Playhouse, constructed out of an old army vehicle maintenance building kindly provided by the Government of the day, was blessed by the then Dean of Georgetown and formally opened by Governor Sir Ralph Grey prior to the first performance on the same night of *His Excellency* which I had the honour to direct. It was a happy coincidence that it was also my birthday.

Dr. Frank Williams was Chairman of the Guild and in his contribution to the opening ceremony he said:

Tonight would not be complete without our acknowledging the debt we all owe to the three founders of the Guild - the late Bertie Martin, Arthur Hemstock and Lloyd Searwar. And I have no hesitation in saying that had it not been for their initiative and planning we would not be here tonight. Our one regret is that Bertie Martin did not live to see his lifelong wish fulfilled.

T.G. was planned to be both the focal point and the stimulus for Theatre in the country as a whole and had and has as its stated aims:

- To sponsor and support productions of Guyanese, West Indian and International plays of the highest possible standards.
- To promote the writing of local plays.
- To encourage the development of the theatre in all its aspects in Guyana.

From the beginning it was recognised that a permanent home - a theatre - was essential to the fulfilment of these aims and the Guild set about involving a wider range of citizens in this task.

A Fund Raising Committee chaired by Lionel Luckhoo Q.C. and a Building Committee chaired by the late James R. Ramphal OBE were established and under their energetic leadership eventually completed their tasks with the successful opening of the Playhouse at a cost of \$23,000 on that momentous night of July 4, 1960.

In the meantime the executive committee had been busy pursuing the Guild's aims with its first weekend training seminar at Queens College, the first play-writing competition and two productions staged at Bishops High School during 1958. One of these, Priestley's *They Came to a City* was also performed in Mackenzie and the other, *The Girl Who Couldn't Quite* was taken to New Amsterdam.

They Came to a City was directed by the indefatigable Arthur Hemstock. A socialist and dedicated Co-operator, he introduced Co-operative thinking and projects into the Sugar Industry long before the Co-operative Republic of Guyana was named as such. Arthur's choice of *They Came to a City* with its vision of an entry into Utopia, was no accident. He wished, like so many of us associated with the Guild, that Guyana would be a Utopia, would be an example of a multi-racial community that really worked and that the Land of six peoples would become in truth the Eldorado that Raleigh had missed.

The Guild in an interesting and rather subliminal way provided a non-political vehicle through which our hopes could be expressed.

Later on Arthur and I were involved in the float parade and other arrangements to mark the visit by Princess Margaret. The parade which depicted the history of Guyana through the presence and arrival of the six peoples had as its theme 'One people one nation one destiny'.

That phrase is now an integral part of Independent Guyana's Coat of Arms and is a modest memorial to Arthur Hemstock's ideals and aspirations.

It was, therefore, not surprising that the casting of Guild productions was without reference to colour, race or creed. We had, for example, Cecily Robinson as Lady Dering and Wilbert Holder as Frank Mainwaring Q.C. in *The Blind Goddess*; Lawrence Thompson as Queeg in *The Caine Mutiny Court Martial*;

Clairmont Taitt as Lucius in *Julius Caesar* and as Master Richard Rich in *A Man for All Seasons* and Carlotta Thomasson as the piano-playing Australian grandma in *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*

Some of our play choices were messages to the community, or so we hoped.

Like Hemstock's *They Came to a City* I wanted to do the *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* because it was about cane cutters in a community different to ours in Guyana where the perspective was that only former slaves and indentured labour cut cane. *His Excellency* was a penetrating study of a mythical colony (Malta actually) with an ex-docker as Governor appointed by a British Labour Government who succeeded because (apart from anything else) he spoke to the very hearts of the people and inspired them in his own simple language with, for example, the line he spoke whilst addressing workers:

"You're no more fit to govern yourselves than a lot of black-faced baboons".

By today's standards of intolerance that could well have started a riot of its own.

There were the regional plays like Jamaican Evan Jones's *In a Backward Country* and Errol Hill's *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* and Frank Pilgrim's eternal *Miriamy* which had its world premiere at the Theatre Guild Playhouse on 24th September 1962.

All of these in their own way had some political or social comments to make as well as being entertaining theatre.

And they were good productions with, in the case of *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*, a particularly fine set in the design and construction of which we were ably assisted by an old D'oyly Carte stage manager, Hamish Wilson, who was on a British Council sponsored assignment to the Guild at the time.

Over the years, the British Council was particularly generous to the Guild in the shape of trainers like Hamish and earlier Graham Suter who adjudicated on the First National Drama Festival and in the training of Guyanese. Two of the Guild's shining stars, Ken Corsbie and Robert Narain, were provided with 3-year scholarships to the Rose Bruford School in Kent, England, and many others received support for shorter courses.

Ken Corsbie, now working professionally out of Barbados, was one of the Guild's most energetic performers and creative directors. There was hardly anything we did between 1957 and 1965 in which he didn't participate. He was Best Actor in 1963.

Robert Narain was one of the founder members of the Guild's Junior Section which helped to nurture such a large number of young people. He played Peter Pan and also appeared in *A Child's Phantasy* and *Amahl and the Night Visitors* before going off to Rose Bruford. He was rated Best Junior in 1964.

So many committed members, performers, dancers, costume and stage people, administrators and keepers of the bar. Where does one start and finish? Let me try some more.

There is no way one can forget either as friends or as performers people like -

Lorna Lampkin, who gained the best actress award in 1962 for her warm uninhibited performance as Norah in *Miriamy* and again in 1964 for *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*.

Eileen McAndrew, best actress in 1963, for *A Man for all Seasons* who was also at her dramatic best in *J.B.* and in *Mother Courage*. Both of these productions were directed by Graham Jones.

Graham Jones, now sadly passed on, who gave so much skill and devotion to years of activity at the Playhouse and was named Best Producer in 1964.

Lawrence Thompson, Best Actor in 1962, towering above us all and whose contribution to the community extended way beyond the Guild but who nevertheless found time to take a very active part as performer in such productions as *Dial M for Murder*, *The Caine Mutiny Court Martial*, *In a Backward Country* and *Miriamy*.

But it's almost indecent to pick out those without talking about some of the many unseen like:

Daphne Rodgers and Cecily Robinson, forever wonders in the costume area, and to this day culture creatures in Georgetown.

Pat Magalee, alas also passed on, whose contribution as secretary knew no bounds.

Barbara Osman, without whose silent significant administrative abilities

as House Manager we could not have achieved success. The fact that she also administered me at work was an added benefit.

Peter Drury, who organised and supervised the building of the playhouse.

Ed Rodway, whose photography was a labour of love.

Glenna Tisshaw, Carolyn Hunter and Kay Glasheen, who among them mastered the membership and on occasion the bar.

Patti Anderson who led and trained the Guild's Dance Group.

Again, that is only a small selection of the tens of creative voluntary people who worked and made the Guild a professional institution and made it possible for me to write in the souvenir programme for the gala performance of *THE FANTASTICKS* held on the occasion of the 1965 Caribbean Summit Meeting on Sunday March 7th, 1965:

"But there is one thing for which the Guild and its members can be justly proud. Throughout the difficulties of the past three years the Guild not only continued but has increased the tempo of its activities. Whilst the activities of many organisations came to a grinding halt or were bedevilled by sectional rivalries the Guild remained firm and the Playhouse continued to be a place where people of all social levels and from all sections of the community could meet in the harmony of a common interest."

But that was not all. During those years Drama and Dance workshops were held in various parts of the country. Annual National Drama Festivals were held, a long series of sponsored radio plays were presented totalling 41 between 1958 and 1965 and we acted as host and tour organisers for such eminent groups as the Mexico City Boys Choir, The Intimate Opera Company and the University of Michigan Jazz Band. The Dance Section and the Junior Section prospered and there were monthly club nights where anything could happen.

Members' Club nights were great and provided opportunities to try our new plays and new ideas and to receive wisdom from visiting greats among whom were Rex Nettleford, Errol Hill, Wolf Mankowitz, Philip Sherlock, Stephen Spender, Samuel Selvon and George Lamming. A star-studded cast indeed. At the time of the *Fantasicks* Gala performance the Guild had 663 senior and 175 junior members.

The only way really to view Theatre Guild's history is to go to the playhouse and spend time carefully reviewing the programmes which line the side of the bar area, for there will be seen hundreds of names, the countless occasions and myriad successes from 1957 through today. Only a future historian will decide whether those already mentioned or the likes of Elizabeth Coltress, Orson Forbes, Sheik Sadeek, Ricardo Smith and Johnny Agard will be played again for posterity.

I suppose if I wanted to highlight events I would pick out the opening of the Playhouse, *Julius Caesar* (if only because I Cassius collapsed at the dress rehearsal and was unable to appear), the Brink Shows, the tours to Mackenzie and *Murder in the Cathedral*.

Unbeknown to the hierarchy of the Anglican church in Guyana I am a son of the Church and by sheer coincidence was asked to give the address to the Annual Meeting of the Friends of St. George's Cathedral in I think 1958.



The
THEATRE GUILD
 OF
BRITISH GUIANA



Presenting

A
 GALA PERFORMANCE
 OF

The
Fantasticks

AT
THE PLAYHOUSE

GEORGETOWN

ON
 SUNDAY, MARCH 7TH

1965

AT
 9 P.M.

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After an interminable procedure of reports by the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer during which I developed a thirst and shared snuff with the ADC to the Governor, the Honourable Herbert, I was eventually called.

I gave a long, erudite but possibly trivial address which served to link the church with the stage (a rusting version of the script is still available) and ended with the following statement :

"I am, as some of you may know, Secretary of the Theatre Guild of British Guiana. In the light of what I have said about the work of the Guilds in the 13th and 14th centuries, I am sure you will agree that the choice of the title 'Theatre Guild' is an interesting and fortunate one, and that there are ways in which together the Church here in B.G. and the stage in the form of the Guild may work together on matters of mutual interest.

Who knows, with the permission of your Grace and Canon Sargisson and the assistance of the Friends of St. George's, we might one day perform Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* in your own Cathedral of St. George."

In 1964 that hope was fulfilled and a magnificently dressed and directed production *Murder in the Cathedral* was indeed presented in the Cathedral of St. George.

Of the people, of the hundreds of people who were and indeed are The Guild I would wish if I may to recall for a curtain call Wilbert Holder. Amusing, energetic, Yes. Talented, disciplined, Yes. Occasionally, like his peer Wordsworth McAndrew unreliable, but a performer of rare excellence in the galaxy of the Theatre Guild of Guyana who went on through television in Trinidad and reached new acclaim there and in the United States in his stage appearances, particularly in the plays of Derek Walcott, St. Lucia's playwright laureate.

Wilbert's other notable attribute was his memory. Memory for lines, memory for people and for trivia. In 1978 I was passing through Trinidad and we had arranged that he would pick me up and we'd go visiting and fire a few. We hadn't met for many years.

About an hour late he arrived and off we set. Going down the hill from the upside down Hilton he told me there was something in the back for me. That something was an L.P. of and his script of Walcott and Macdermot's *The Joker of Seville*. in which he had recently played Juan.

On the script he had written

"So that an old colleague may share the beautiful works with which I am now privileged to be involved" (Wilbert. P.O.S./ T'DAD. July 1978).

It was in fact July 4th 1978. He had remembered my birthday. His recent death at 51 is a Caribbean-wide tragedy.

My great regret is that circumstances prevented us appearing together last year in Georgetown in a production of Derek Walcott's two part play *Pantomime*. I am sure it would have been a memorable occasion.

Throughout this piece I am conscious that many many people have not been named. I would like to think they do not mind too much and will take their credit and their bow in the words of Errol Hill, UWI Extra Mural Tutor in Creative Arts, who in 1964 described the Theatre Guild of Guyana as

"The most vital and active Theatre Group in the Caribbean".

IS GUYANESE PROFESSIONAL THEATRE TRULY PROFESSIONAL?

BY RON ROBINSON

With the advent of professional theatre in Guyana came a new breed of actors, technicians, critics, audience and even playwrights. More persons are showing interest in various aspects of theatre - both on and off stage. More actors are being nurtured and have greater opportunities to perfect their art with an increase in performance opportunities. With more companies being formed (though many have already folded) stage crews and technicians are being challenged more; critics are in a better position to constructively guide; audiences have a wider choice of plays; playwrights, hitherto fearful, are maturing and are seeking advice on their works which they're submitting.

This growth of interest and awareness is directly linked to the establishment of the Theatre Company in November, 1981. Many who now enjoy the fruits felt that the cultural soil was too rocky to plant any theatrical seeds and expect growth. Though their fears and scepticism have been proven unfounded, and the Theatre Company has succeeded where many had feared to tread, many have hewed at the tree that has helped to nourish their talents.

The general statement that "Guyanese theatre is in a bad shape" is certainly untrue. There are many things wrong but most are situations and not problems. Indeed there's greater awareness of drama in Guyana today - an unprecedented support of theatrical endeavours. Persons are now given a choice of theatre entertainment - an annual satirical review, musicals, and plays from around the world. Touring groups from Trinidad and Jamaica have been hosted by Guyanese groups and Guyanese have been warmly welcomed throughout the Caribbean and as far as New York and Washington - exposing Guyanese and Caribbean plays to wider and more diverse audiences.

For about two decades the Theatre Guild was the nursery for dramatists and most of the experienced actors of today have a solid foundation laid by this institution of amateur drama which continues to serve a very useful purpose. Unfortunately, the inevitable advent of professional theatre was regarded by many - especially those in the higher echelons of amateur theatre - as an attempt to crush their integral part of theatre development. Attempts to establish peaceful co-existence between the two have been thwarted at times by backstabbing and jealousy. Six years after the establishment of Guyana's first professional theatre (The Theatre Company), amateur theatre is slowly but surely feeling more secure and less threatened which augurs well for the future. Their fears have been proven to be unfounded.

Professional theatre has, however, created other monsters which will affect both levels of drama, perhaps moreso the amateur level. Actors are of the opinion that payment of a fee for performance is the main spur to the highest level of performance. Undoubtedly payment indicates professionalism but it

seems that the new adage of the performing artist is: "How much you pay is how well I play".

At the root of the problem is the *raison d'être* of some companies which seem interested in financial returns more than dramatic excellence. Indeed the band-wagon is overloaded with theatre producers who have jumped on it for the quick dollar. One might say .. "the love of the box-office returns is the root of all dramatic evil" - an attitude which has been 'cast' down. As a result, actors' monetary demands (and demands they are) are leaping faster than their experience or improvement of performance would dictate. Greed has become one of the greatest ills of Guyanese theatre.

Was professional theatre premature? Should we have retained and relied upon amateur theatre only? This would surely have meant disregard and disrespect of the performing arts as a profession. It was the disrespect that became a factor in the emigration of the stalwarts of the Guyanese stage who became luminaries beyond the "mud-banks" - Wilbert Holder, Ken Corsbie, Clairmont Taitt, Dr. Michael Gilkes, Marc Matthews, Wordsworth McAndrew - and the list goes on. These Guyanese were true professionals, genuine artists who cherished their craft ... yet they received no payment. Today we are faced with the converse - the apparent professional who doesn't have nearly as high a respect for his work but who is paid. Our critics are too often right in making this assumption - nay, statement.

There is a concerted effort among actors to discredit the critics, a distinct dislike of critiques instead of an analytical study of their content. Can this be the reaction of true professionals? What seems to be overlooked by performers is that with an increase of activity in the world of theatre in Guyana there is an increase of exposure to criticism; and with motivation of performance being too often monetary there is adequate and frequent opportunity for the critic to see through the veneer and identify the problems and shortcomings. Perhaps a closer relationship with and understanding of the role of the critic is necessary. What "professional" actors fail to realize is that many critiques of amateur productions are also very strongly worded but also constructive.

So, many fears have raised their heads and with them there is greed - a greed that has threatened many a production which has been held to ransom by actors. Producers' risks are not taken into account by actors who seem bent on extracting every possible cent out of them.

As stated, professional theatre's monsters have affected both the professional and amateur levels. Practitioners on the amateur stage have become jealous of their counterparts' talent fees. They enjoy the elaborate venue of the 2,000 seat National Cultural Centre. The irony of it is that those who have performed at the Centre long for the intimacy of the Theatre Guild- to many an Alma Mater. Worse than this envy is that of some professionals of others in the professional field - comparisons being made of talent fees.

It must be noted, however, that there are many in our midst who don't indulge in these malignancies of professional theatre, at least not evidently so.

Where lies the hope for the future?

More companies have been established than ever before; actors are more regularly on stage; back-stage crew have more opportunities to perfect their craft; theatre audiences have a wider selection of plays; critics have more to

criticise; and the National Cultural Centre smiles more often on the way to the bank. In fact, the establishment of the Theatre Company in 1981 transformed the Cultural Centre from "a white elephant" to "a horse of a different colour". In six years the Theatre Company has paid nearly \$700,000 in rent to the Centre. An annual satirical review, *The Link Show*, has established itself among theatre-goers and is undoubtedly the major theatre event of the year, so much so that accusations have been levelled at the company of "commercialism", "popular theatre" and "pandering to audiences". Is this another manifestation of jealousy? It is quite true that the Theatre Company has enjoyed tremendous success at the box office but it has staged productions very similar in nature to other groups, but with much more success. This support, the Company is convinced, is as a result of its continuous efforts at providing the highest standards. Because it has achieved this it enjoys the support it does. Many patrons' selection of plays is dependent on whether or not it is a production of The Theatre Company - the reason being given that their standards are always high. The Company, on the other hand, has staged many plays which it knew would not be box-office hits - e.g. *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, *Pantomime*, *Masquerade*, *Two can Play* and *Old Story Time*. These plays were staged because of their relevance and message - they had to be done, for overlooking them would have been discredit.

Some productions, on the other hand, have appeared to be major money-spinners and tremendous box-office hits, e.g. *Jesus Christ Superstar*, but which in fact have been failures at the box-office. This production, considered by many as the most enterprising ever attempted by Guyanese, was staged at a loss of over \$25,000. Nevertheless, it remains one of the most magnificent of theatre endeavours to date in the country, perhaps the region.

The Company more often than not chooses a play based on a director's wish, not on the box-office potential of the work. It is true that some plays achieve greater patronage than others and are commercially viable, but this is by no means the sole criterion for their selection. The Company has to generate income for the payment of salaries, investment in future productions, stationery, talent fees and hundreds of other expenses. No grants or financial backing are received. Yet accusations are levelled at this group which was the catalyst for the increased activity and awareness of dramatists since 1981.

Perhaps the Theatre Company is partly to blame for the emergence of a new breed of greedy actors because of the attractive talent fees it has paid to actors and stage crew. It is not uncommon for some actors to receive in excess of \$5,000 per annum for their work. This supplements and indeed complements their regular income. The Company has paid talent fees in excess of \$554,000 in just under six years of operation. Maybe this is responsible to some extent for the attitudes of some professionals. When compared to their counterparts in the Caribbean another monster might be created when this publication is read by dramatists in the region. My apologies to my fellow Caribbean producers.

The pity is that there has become evident a laissez-faire attitude and an element of complacency among actors in particular. They demand greater remuneration but oppose demands of producers for greater commitment and dedication. Add to this the "prima-donnaism" of some and the problem becomes only too evident.

It has reached a point where few persons (so called dramatists) pit one

company against the other in the hope of gaining more in the end. The backstabbing and petty jealousies emanate all too frequently from the dramatists themselves. Is this true professionalism? We have a far way to go, and we have taken the first steps of this arduous journey.

Workshops are being conducted in an effort to lay the kind of foundation on which to build genuine artists with a true love of drama. These workshops will also broaden the base and increase the number of actors available for selection. The public see a greater variety of casts, and actors will have more time to rehearse. These workshops will have to be increased in order to accelerate the current training programme of both The Theatre Company and the Theatre Guild and more resource persons will have to become involved in this training.

In spite of all the dark clouds that hover over Guyanese theatre there are many silver linings - those dramatists who, like Holder, Taitt and the others of yore are concerned and genuinely interested in eradicating the malignant tumours and fostering a better understanding among their peers. Fortunately their numbers are growing and the cure has begun to take effect.

Professional theatre in Guyana will indeed set an example to other spheres of activity in the country by recognising its ills and removing them from under the carpet where they have been swept by a few for too long. This has happened in the Government service, the private sector to a lesser extent and even in sport and cultural activities. Guyanese society, as *The Link Show* has pointed out, is loaded with incompetence and inefficiency. Perhaps theatre will be forceful enough to bring about a change of attitude.

This will be an uphill task to say the least. The Guyana Government has never seen it fit to have dramatists represent the country at an official level under their auspices. Carifesta began here in 1972, and since that time no drama from Guyana has ever been seen at this Festival; this has always been the good fortune of choirs, musicians and dancers. Some day, hopefully, the powers that be will recognise our profession as such ... but first, we too must recognise it ourselves.

Guyanese theatre is still in good shape -
... But there are many things wrong with it -
... But there is hope!

A NOTE ON MARTIN CARTER'S 'BENT'

BY ALAN PERSICO

Guyanese poet Martin Carter (1927), arguably the first major English Caribbean poet of revolution, is perhaps most known for his *Poems of Resistance* (1954), which were described as "... one eloquent refusal to be dehumanised by imperialist bayonets and colonial arms." [1] And in fact, although much attention has been paid to this distinguished poet, emphasis seems to have been placed mainly on the element of social protest and politics contained in his works, than on their structural and stylistic features. The present paper focuses on a poem included in Carter's *Poems of Affinity* (1980), a collection which deserves much attention from critics. The present writer's intention is to take a close look at the poem 'Bent' (p.41) and to comment on its importance, thematically and stylistically, within Carter's poetic production, so as to emphasise where this poem lies in the context of his work. But perhaps the view to be expressed here will be better appreciated if some brief references are made to what critics have had to say on the question of West Indian poetry in general, and of Guyanese poetry in particular.

It is usual, in the early stages of a movement toward literary independence, for colonised peoples to attempt to imitate the writings of their "masters" while at the same time to show how different their own environment and circumstances are from those of the foreigner. This was the case, generally, of the tendencies of West Indian poetry of the forties and fifties, where the differences between the local landscape and the European were highlighted. However, this trend was soon to change as greater social and political consciousness developed. [2] This change, as is to be expected, was very closely linked to the search for identity, a question so ably dealt with by the Haitian Rene Depestre, for example. [3] Martin Carter himself observes:

For identity is an open-ended thing, and a process and a becoming; a process and a becoming in which even without a conscious intention on the part of the human agent, the objective world is humanised and the human world objectivised. This dialectical process applies both to the individual and the society, and is in fact the process in which both identity and alienation are established as primary elements in the mode of human beings. [4]

One critic makes the point that two poems, one by A.J. Seymour, 'Over Guiana Clouds' the other by Wilson Harris, 'From Eternity to Season', show the focus that West Indian poetry was to take later. Seymour "attempts to see his country as a complex of many factors, geographical, historical, and racial." On the other hand, Harris presents Caribbean man in a "never-ending creative

quest." [5] What one notes is that there are still references to Nature and to the uniqueness of the region, but within these, there is an urgent search for identity, for roots. It is an optimistic quest for a true independence, for a reason for being, beyond the political.

In a sense, Martin Carter's work embodies a synthesis of the two prominent tendencies noted in Seymour and Harris. Firstly, the vision of a complex society exposed to certain internal influences, particularly the social and the political; secondly, the view of man as a being eternally in the process of becoming, until the moment of death arrives and consequently, one's choices automatically cease. This tendency is inherent not only in the individual, but also in society as a whole. [6]

After Carter's first collection of poems to receive international significance, the "politically committed" *Poems of Resistance*, Edward Baugh observed: "Unfortunately he (Carter) seems to have been dormant since then. Perhaps his Muse needed that particular upheaval ..." [7] However time has shown that Martin Carter has continued to produce poetry of distinction whether it be from the social, the political, or the existential point of view. Note for example, his *Poems of Succession* (1977) which "can be read as a meditation on the nature of language and cognition," [8] and in particular the existentialist tone of the *Poems of Affinity* (1980) on which special attention is to be focused here. [9]

It has been observed that "the poetry of Martin Carter undergoes a radical transformation after *Poems of Resistance*." [10] Although the observation is to a large extent true, I would rather see this phenomenon as a logical readjustment from an external, descriptive type poetry, to a more introspective, reflective vision, from being general and "other-oriented", to being more personal and personalised. The political and social protest is not so evident for example in the *Poems of Affinity*, but the note of frustration, disillusionment, pessimism, and subdued bitterness is still there. The aggression is not so poignant, at least not obviously so. Indeed it is interesting to note that the glimmer of optimism, hope for progress, and a future in which "the world must reckon with his strength as a factor for help to shape it," as noted by Seymour [11] does not seem to have materialised in *Poems of Affinity*. In addition, the search for identity, individual identity, is more obvious. The poet nonetheless seems to have accepted his "throwness", in the existentialist sense, even as he does ask questions relating to the matter of 'what is my role/destiny'. He poses the following question in one of his poems included in *Poems of Affinity*:

Why,

I have to ask, do I have to
arrange anything, when every
thing is already arranged
by love's and death's inscrutable
laws, mortal judiciary, time's
doll house of replaceable heads,
arms and legs? (p.47)

Perhaps the above can be better understood if one takes into consideration the following observation made by Carter on one occasion:

Self-consciousness itself is an issue, itself subsumed by the issue that subsumes all issues: human fate. The artist cannot change the nature of his fate: all he can do is endure it. At the same time it is his society which has to provide the conditions that make his fate endurable.[12]

Indeed it may be worthy of note that in *Poems of Affinity* the poet does not pose questions in a direct manner, about six or so, but the questions are always very revealing and thought-provoking. Here is another example:

Is it only just a misfortune
to be as we are; bad luck
carefully chosen? (p.15)

In the collection *Poems of Affinity*, Martin Carter is commenting, in a personal sense, on the results, the outcomes of the social situation and political realities that he came out against in many of his earlier poems. But here, he seems more concerned about his own individual identity and destiny.

Commenting on the question of the analysis and interpretation of poetry A.J. Seymour, himself poet and critic, made the observation that the words in a poem are full of music and pictures and other images which together convey thoughts and feelings, and that "these words have been shaped in the gifted mind of the poet and bear the special stamp of his imagination and his creative faculty as a poet." [13] This is certainly true of Martin Carter. As he himself states: "One cannot become a poet unless one works hard at it; one must dream it; dream life; dream language; dream death." [14]

As we stated earlier, the poem I have selected for study in the present paper is called 'Bent'. It was selected because it seems to be one of Carter's most thought poems, both structurally and stylistically, and because it seems to reflect the themes, the reason for being, the leitmotif of his poetic production as a whole.

It was noted that critics of Martin Carter's poetry have tended to focus most attention on the message, on the meaning aspect while not treating sufficiently the formal or the stylistic aspect. Of course, in attempting to focus on style and structure, there is often the danger of the critic being "drawn into an aestheticism that denies social function altogether." [15] Nonetheless my purpose at this time is, in part, to highlight how the poet creates a fusion of form and content in this poem, and also, to demonstrate to what extent this poem is a true reflection of Carter's work in general. Here is the poem:

On the street, the sun
rages. The bent back of
an old woman resurrects
the brimmed bucket of this world's
light and insupportable
agony. A damage of years.

Her bent back, time's bad
step, and the creeping out
is ash; is the crushed cloud

of an incredible want.

The last time I saw her
she was far more truthful
than the damage of the years
carried on her back. The
sky, blue and ever,
imitates her. Bent.

The theme of the poem is Man's powerlessness against Time and the inevitability of change. Its tone is pessimistic, emphasising change for the worse, change toward destruction.[16] Man is a prisoner of Time, which constantly heaps bundles of pain and agony on the individual.

'Bent' is one of only three poems in the collection that are divided into clearly defined stanzas, and, of the three, it is the only one that is clearly symmetrical, its stanzas being of six lines, four lines, and six lines. The lines of each stanza are noticeably short, between five and eight syllables, suggesting perhaps an idea of directness, intensity, and futility, particularly when taken in the context of what the poem is saying. One cannot help noticing too that there are few verbs, most of which are very carefully chosen and positioned, for maximum effect.[17] The title of the poem repeats itself in each stanza, though in a different way, so that the reader has to remain face to face with the fact of his own destiny: bent, bent back, back... bent. 'Bent' is both the first and the last word! What is striking is that the poet focuses on the old woman's back, on which, in a sense, the whole body hinges. This clearly relates to the idea of the burdens she had to bear, both physically and metaphorically. The poem moves from a concrete, physical reality - the time worn, bent back of a woman, who ironically should suggest fertility and life, and this serves as a stimulus for reflection on the passing of Time. A contrast is drawn later with the sky that is "blue and ever", is always there, unchanging, which, unlike the old women, is inanimate. There is a touch of sarcasm in the statement that the sky imitates her, when it was she who came into the world and encountered the sky bent as it is, and when she leaves it will still be bent. The point is that Man is doomed to imitate the sky, but only so far as shape is concerned. He is shaped by Nature, or perhaps his destiny. He is imprisoned in a situation into which he is born, exists, and dies. And that is the tragedy. The key ideas in the poem then are those of inevitable change to which Man is subjected, the worsening or the deteriorating of his physical self as well as of his circumstances, and the fact that the direction of the change is pre-established, so that Man is a prisoner, not only in the physical sense, but also in the metaphysical. The bent back of an old woman emphasises in the poet's mind the cruelty, the tragedy of this world in which Man is inevitably at the mercy of Time, that more often than not metes out to him unending and unfair pain and agony. Man's only freedom from such a situation, hopefully, death - "ash", despite Man's impertinent wish to live forever, his "incredible want". Man's brief moments of optimism or hope are snuffed out by his sudden awareness, or his sudden awakening to the truth of his circumstances.

Now in an attempt to show how the message in the poem is also conveyed

at the visual, auditory and syntactic levels, I am now going to take a closer look at the poem's language, style and structure.

In stanza one there are many words that show what some linguists and psycholinguists refer to as a deviation from the norm. For example, the sun does not just shine, it "rages"; the "bent back" should not normally be so. Note also the negation contained in "insupportable agony" and in "damage". They connote a movement toward destruction and death, not to life and health. Even in the case where there is a deviation in an apparently positive direction, "resurrects", "brimmed bucket", it is of "light and insupportable agony", which in fact doubles or intensifies the pain and anguish, rather than hoped for relief. This is an example of the movement toward destruction and deterioration mentioned earlier. The last line of this first stanza, conspicuous because of its position, sums up the emotion conjured up by the photo-like description presented in the introduction of the poem: "agony. A damage of years." The poem is driving the point home so directly and intensely that the reader cannot escape the reality of it. There seems to be a conflict in the use of "light" yet "insupportable" agony. But perhaps precisely because "agony" is abstract, that it does not have weight in the concrete sense, that it is not necessarily observable to others, it is thus more elusive and uncontrollable, and difficult to eliminate - which reinforces even further the poet's point. Words and expressions such as "bent back, brimmed bucket, agony, damage," are among those that contain harsh sounds that create a sense of heaviness, bitterness, despair and helplessness. But, as was noted, these are precisely the sentiments that are being resurrected.

Stanza two maintains our focus of attention on the bent back, juxtaposed with "time" and "bad step". Time, the central mover, and "bad" the negative tone, are both associated with "step". These three words, that may be seen to form one constituent, linked as they are capture in telescopic fashion one of the central ideas in the poem. Time is on the move, and the old woman is on the move until, silently and softly, almost imperceptibly, she creeps out to "ash". The movement from existence to non-existence is conveyed on the level of sound also: from the harsh sounds in "bent back" and "bad step", there is movement to the soft sound of "ash". Man's impertinence in wishing to live forever is abruptly wiped out by his awareness of his harsh reality, communicated here by the sound in the imagery "crushed cloud". The idea of suddenness and of brevity is also suggested in the conciseness of the stanza.

The external stimulus of the bent back, which is mainly what is focused on in stanza one, and repeated in stanza two, causes reflection on the poet's part in stanza three about his own relationship or status vis-a-vis the bent back he is observing, and implies too, from what follows, that he too must be growing old. When he first saw her she was more "truthful", that is, more authentic, more what she ought to be, in the full bloom of youth perhaps. She is now neither "ever" nor "blue", especially where the latter is taken to connote radiance, life, optimism, and strength.

Each of the elements sun, cloud, and sky, all of which relate to Nature, is very conspicuous in its own stanza. They all assist in maintaining the focus of the poem's central idea, and are used in such a way as to communicate conflict between Man and Nature, a conflict in which Nature is the victor. The sun, often interpreted as a symbol of energy, of a life-giving force, is here, paradoxically,

portrayed as cruel and unkind. No wonder the repetition of the idea of the destruction caused by Time. However, in stanza one, it is almost no more than a passing comment on the part of the poet when he observes: "A damage of years". In stanza three the observation assumes more importance: "the damage of the years". In other words, from being a general observation on the effects of Time, it becomes a direct reference to the effect of Time on this particular, specific old lady. And this leads to a sort of indirect consideration of the poet's own status, within the context of Time, destruction, and destiny.

A close look at the selection of the verbs and the tense in which they are helps us to appreciate the sequence around which the poem was constructed: present - observation and description of an event in progress; present - reflection on the effects of Time; past - reflection on the change that has occurred; present - reflection on a possible relationship between Man and Nature, through the concept of imitation.

'Bent' is one of Martin Carter's most closely knit poems structurally, visually, and conceptually. It is one of his most complete, artistically satisfying poems, pointed and direct, yet reflective and nostalgic. It was stated earlier that this poem is an adequate representative both of Carter's concerns and preoccupations, and of his poetic style: the note of protest and dissatisfaction, the tragic view of life, the identification of self with the Other, the potential agony of existence, whether it be a result of social and political circumstances, or in the course of one's own natural development or process of becoming, the idea that Man is a prisoner of Time and circumstances. In the *Poems of Affinity* it is no longer a prison in the literal sense, but it still implies a lack of control over oneself, one's movements and one's destiny. Whereas in *Poems of Resistance* he would say directly:

This is what they do with me
put me in prison, hide me away
cut off the world, cut out the sun
darken the land, blacken the flower
stifle my breath and hope that I die, (p.21)

in 'Bent', he is a prisoner in the world, by Nature itself. Worthy of note perhaps in the above is the reference to the natural world. These elements are also present in his later poetry. In one of his best known poems, "University of Hunger", there is reference to the effects of Time on Man, and again the implication is that it is Man who leaves Nature behind:

The green tree bends above the long forgotten. (p. 8)

The point is being made that there seems to be an element of continuity in Martin Carter's poetic production.

To conclude, in the poem 'Bent', we note a perfect fusion of form and content, two elements which, although in a sense inseparable, can be isolated for the purpose of illustrating how they support each other as the poet works then to achieve maximum effect on the reader. Reading "Bent" for meaning in the normal sense, one can understand the poet's views and concerns, but on a purely intellectual level. It is when one perceives in the poem the unique content, that one is truly appreciating not only the poem, but also its creator.

NOTES

1. Neville Dawes, Preface to the 2nd Edition of *Poems of Resistance*.
2. See Louis James, "Caribbean Poetry in English - Some Problems," *Savacou*, 2, (Sept. 1970), 78-86
3. Rene Depestre, Problems of Identity for the Black Man in the Caribbean," in *Carifesta Forum*, ed. John Hearne (Kingston, J'ca: Institute of Jamaica, 1976), pp. 61-67. See also W.I. Carr, "The West Indian Novelist: Prelude and Context", *Caribbean Quarterly*, 2, nos. 1 & 2, (1965), 71-84.
4. Martin Carter, "Man and Making - Victim and Vehicle", *The Edgar Mittelholzer Memorial Lectures*, 4th series, (October, 1971), 5.
5. Louis James (ed.), *The Islands in Between: Essays on West Indian Literature*, (London: OUP, 1968), pp. 27, 28.
6. See also Mary Castaneda de Alarcon, *La busqueda de la identidad nacional en la literatura guyanesa contemporanea*, (Merida: Universidad de los Andes, 1980)
7. Edward Baugh, *West Indian Poetry 1900-1970; A study in Cultural Decolonisation*, Pamphlet no. 1, (Kingston, J'ca: Savacou Publications, n.d.)p. 13.
8. Jeffrey Robinson, "The Guyaneness of Guyanese writing," *Kyk-over-al*, 31 (June, 1985), 48.
9. Some of Martin Carter's poems are repeated in other collections of his, but he has nonetheless written a significant number of poems since *Poems of Resistance*.
10. Jeffrey Robinson, "The Guyaneness of Guyanese Writing," 49.
11. A. J. Seymour, *Studies of Ten Guyanese Poems* (Georgetown: Ministry of Education, 1982), p. 36.
12. Martin Carter, "The Location of the Artist", *Release*, 8 & 9 (1979), 4.
13. A. J. Seymour, *Studies of Ten Guyanese Poems*, pp. 7-8.
14. Martin Carter & Bill Carr, "In Contradiction: Bill Carr Raps with Martin Carter, *Release*, 1, (1978), 5.
15. Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*, (London Faber & Faber, 1970) p. 14.
16. Carter once noted his admiration for the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, whose poems also reflect a movement toward destruction and deterioration, and pessimism. *Release*, 1, (1978), 13.
17. "... because I live in metaphors. Two lines are equal to a book." Martin Carter, *Release*, 1, (1978), 18.

INTERVIEW WITH JAN CAREW

From Frank Birbalsingh

Q: Was there any literary interest on either side of your family?

A: My father was very creative. His greatest passion in life was to paint and draw.

Q: But you grew up with your mother?

A: Effectively yes. She was the dominant figure in my life, in the lives of my sister and myself. She saw that we were educated because my father did not really care whether we were educated or not.

Q: Where were you educated?

A: I went to Berbice High School.

Q: Berbice High School is connected with Indians and the Presbyterian Church. Why did your mother not send you to Queen's College?

A: Well, I think this was very good of her. We had remarkable masters, like J. A. Rodway, who, of course, also taught Derek Walcott. The most vivid thing I remember about Rodway was his love for art and literature. I remember him bringing to our class Renaissance paintings and giving us long talks about their meaning. He used to communicate his enthusiasm and lend you books, English poetry, Dickens, writers he liked. So it was a very literary relationship, which I would not have got at Queen's College, which would have been more structured. Then there was Ben Yisu Das. When he walked up and down and lectured, the whole room lit up. Whatever he was lecturing on became fantastically interesting. He taught history and I really liked history. We did the history of the British Empire for the Cambridge exams. We were identifying with Drake and Hawkins and Frobisher and so on, when Yisu Das gave us, in translation, Spanish histories of the same period to read. The heroes of English history were no different from the heroes of Spanish history. He did not say anything. He just left it like that. It stunned you. If he had preached at you, it might not have had the same effect. So that gave me a clear insight on how subjective this imperialist business was. But the school was interesting. It was a residential school. Barefoot peasant boys would come out of the Corentyne to Berbice High School and be transformed. In Berbice I was exposed to the whole multi-ethnic way of Guyana: the lore of the Corentyne, which I loved, the landscapes, the people, their relationships, and

their vendettas. The Corentyne was like the Wild West in those days. People would ambush you in the back alley. I used to go out sometimes with armed outriders around me. There was cursing and killing. But it was a beautiful period of growing up.

Q: We get some of this experience in *The Wild Coast*. Did Mittelholzer also go Berbice High School?

A: Yes, but he was expelled when he was thirteen years old, for kicking a white (English) master at the school. The man had insulting remark about the natives.

Q: The small area around New Amsterdam produced Martin Carter, E. R. Braithwaite, Edgar Mittelholzer, Wilson Harris and yourself. Was it pure accident, that one town in British Guiana, in the 1930s, produced all these writers?

A: New Amsterdam used to be the old Dutch capital, and Berbice was really quite different from Demerara where the English had settled mostly. There was more of a cohesive cultural matrix in New Amsterdam. Traditions were fiercely guarded, although New Amsterdam was an absolute backwater in terms of Georgetown. There were no industries to speak of. It was a joke about how people used to peek behind the curtains in New Amsterdam when they saw a stranger. But in the 1930s there was a great deal of art, painting, literature, music, poetry, reading in New Amsterdam. Mittelholzer, for example, like me, was first a painter. He came into prominence when he sent in a watercolour to a British Empire art exhibition and won a prize.

Q: His beginning as a writer has always seemed to me utterly courageous, almost incredible to have happened in Guyana at that time.

A: It bordered on madness. The whole town was against him. He wrote a variety of things. He wrote lyrics for calypsos, and because he came out of New Amsterdam, he was steeped in the folk culture. All other things came out of this. *Creole Chips* was a collection of local legends and stories out of the old tradition. It was a profound ethnographic study. He went to work at one time for Davson, and every morning this white director would come in and everybody had to stand. Mittelholzer was sitting with his leg up on the desk, waiting. The man "Good morning," and Mittelholzer said nothing. They fired him. All of these rebellions added to his reputation. Then you heard that he was a writer. He published *Creole Chips* at his own expense and sold it from door to door. It was the first major publication in the modern Guyanese Renaissance of writing.

Q: Did he write anything before that?

A: He wrote a lot of stories. There used to be ads in foreign magazines which said, "Send me a short story and I will criticize it free of charge," in order to induce you to buy something. So Edgar used to write his short stories,

send them to these people, and get their criticism. That spurred him on. The only critical eye he had on his work was these magazines hustling subscriptions. They went on for years. Endless submissions and endless rejections. Yet undiminished optimism kept him on. He did not let it crush him; until finally **Corentyne Thunder** was accepted by an English publisher in 1941.

Q: When did your own writing begin?

A: Rodway encouraged me to write, when I wrote essays at school. Then we moved to Georgetown where I worked in the civil service as a customs officer. I was writing then. I would write for the local magazine, the **Christmas Annual**. I also did a lot of drawing and painting. I really thought that painting would be my main focus, not writing.

Q: Did you know Wilson Harris or any other writers at that time?

A: I knew Wilson very well because he was courting my sister in Georgetown. He married my sister. Wilson and I became very close--night and day, shouting, arguing, discussing, reading--Marx, Spengler, Nietzsche, anything. Of course, it was a formative period. The context in which we were arguing was completely wrong. We just did not have the education. Nonetheless, it was a very alive and exciting period.

Q: Who were some of the other people in Georgetown at that time?

A: I knew Wilson because he was a surveyor, and there were other surveyors like Sydney Singh, who had a lot to do with shaping my vision. You see, the surveyors were an interesting breed. They had to break out of the structures of Georgetown to go into the interior and spend long periods by themselves. So it was complete isolation without the kind of intellectual exchange that would go on in the normal course of things. Wilson lived with this for about seventeen years. It explains some of his writing in **Palace of the Peacock**. That is the kind of writing of someone accustomed to talking to himself in the Guyana bush for seventeen years!

Q: **Palace of the Peacock** came out in 1960.

A: Andrew Salkey was one of the key figures in getting that book out. Andrew helped both Harris and Naipaul to get published. He wrote an analysis of **Peacock** and recommended it.

Q: I think it is rather nice that struggling West Indian novelists stuck together and helped each other in the beginning. Later, they branched out. This is natural, and then rivalries and conflicts came.

A: There were always links. Sam Selvon and I were always friends. There was never any rift. Lamming, too. V. S. Naipaul and I had an extremely good

friendship. We always got on well.

Q: But there was no formal rift with him?

A: No, we were friends right up to the time we last met.

Q: When you left Guyana, where did you first go?

A: I went on a long leave to Trinidad and bluffed my way into getting a job in the Price Control Board, which paid me about three times what I was earning in the civil service in Guyana. Then I left for the U. S. A., wholly on my own. I had saved that money, the only time in my life I saved money in that fashion. I lived in the country and I saved most of my salary and paid my own way. The family gave me some subsidies. So I left for Howard University in Washington, D.C.

Q: You got entrance while you were in Trinidad?

A: Yes, I wrote and got accepted. I went to Howard around 1946, immediately after the war, when they doubled up their programmes to accommodate service men who had missed out. In one year you could do two years of study by going right through the year without holidays. You just had one week off. So I went on that programme, to do two years in one year, because I feared that my resources would not hold out.

Q: How long were you at Howard?

A: I was at Howard for one year.

Q: But you did not get a degree?

A: No, I hated it.

Q: Why?

A: I hated the racial discrimination in Washington, the ghettoized existence of blacks and West Indians.

Q: How did you find Howard?

A: At Howard it was all right because there were many West Indians who cut across a lot of lines which would have existed for them in the Caribbean. Then you had Afro-American friends too. The race situation bewildered people. I couldn't stand it after a while, so I decided to head up north. I had heard about the Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland from a classmate at Howard who was from Cleveland. It was a big white university. I took the Greyhound bus one night and headed up to Cleveland. I was at Case Western Reserve for two two years, and while there I met a Czech, the son of the

Czech Consul General, who was a classmate of mine. He told me there were scholarships at Charles University for Third World students. He got the application forms from his father. I applied and they gave me a scholarship to Charles University. I did not graduate from Case Western Reserve because I got this scholarship, and I would have had to put out so much money to graduate that I was glad to get out.

Q: What studies did you do at Case Western Reserve?

A: I did pre-medicine studies.

Q: So it was all scientific work.

A: Yes, I never did anything artistic. I took one course in journalism at Howard. At Case Western Reserve I took economics and geopolitics. My major was science. I was doing physics, chemistry, math, biology.

Q: Up to the time when you were in your early twenties, in your mind, you envisioned a medical career?

A: No, I did not envision a medical career. My mother sort of pushed me into it. I resisted it. I didn't want to be a doctor. But at the Case Western Reserve I began both to write and to paint seriously. I thought then that I would take to painting. But something happened while I was studying, and I realized that I was not going to make the kind of sacrifice that would be necessary to bring painting to a point where it would completely satisfy me. I left Case Western Reserve, got the scholarship to Prague, and went to Guyana. This was in 1949, and I stayed in Guyana for a fairly long time.

Q: How long?

A: About eight months.

Q: Your mother was still there?

A: My mother was there, and Wilson was there. Cheddi Jagan had just come back from America. I heard him speaking on a street corner one night in Georgetown. He was analyzing the role of the peasant in Guyanese life and his relationship to the big estates, how they steal his own land and only cultivate small portions of it, how they control water and land, and penalize the independent peasant. No one had ever done that kind of analysis. It had a tremendous effect on me.

Q: Did you know of him before.

A: No. When I heard him speak on that street corner, I went to his house that night and said to him, "Look, nobody has ever talked like that before in this country. I want to join you right away, and help out in any way I can." That

was when I met Martin Carter and Sydney King. We were all very close then. **The Political Action Bulletin** was the predecessor of **Thunder**. I began to write for that paper and go to meetings at night with Cheddi. Wilson Harris was very much a part of the movement then. He was a great admirer of Cheddi, and Cheddi used to rely on him. So that was the great lively time, bulging with all sorts of things. We used to read poetry to each other at night, write a poem and then read it to the group, and they criticised it and you went on. Martin read his poems, and Wilson would read and explain it in a convoluted fashion. Wilson was a man who was never aware of his surroundings. He walked through that Guyanese jungle for seventeen years without even a penknife. Wilson was comparing the long savannahs to the plains where Achilles and Hector fought, and in a poem he wrote about Hector, you could actually see Hector on the long savannah. It was really incongruous. How could you bring Hector into this rain-forest bush? With tigers barking at night, Wilson was sitting at his campfire, arguing about Spengler.

Q: Was it not perverse, Wilson importing all this extra-cultural material-- Greek and Roman myths-- into the Guyanese landscape?

A: That is the thing. Wilson made it totally believable. It was the natural part of our world. After the ferment of those items, I wrote **Street of Eternity**, a book of poems. It was very important in my literary career because it was like a breaking-out, a catalyst. It led me to prose writing.

Q: All this was in that eight-month period around 1949? It must have been very productive.

A: It was tremendously important and stimulating. We took Martin up to Canje, Wilson and I. All day long we were talking about books and poetry, night and day. We were all writing. The writing was rubbing off, with the conviviality. The creative thing was really getting us. The political aspect was profoundly affecting the creative part. There was a symbiotic relationship. Then I left for Prague via Paris. It was in Paris that I began to mingle in the society of writers. There was the Brazilian painter Tiberio, and I became very close friends with him. I wrote a play about him and he was a character in **The Last Barbarian**. Tiberio was a very famous painter, a close friend of Picasso. I met Picasso through him. Picasso came to open an exhibition, and I met Picasso subsequently in Czechoslovakia. He came to the Writers' Class. So the Tiberio encounter was very important for me. I heard for the first time about Jorge Amado, then I met him in Prague. I began studies there, in the Faculty of Natural Science, in research into radio isotopes, post-graduate work. The Communists had taken over. I used to write for journals in Prague and at one point I sang in a nightclub. Then I left Prague and went back to Paris. I began to write in Paris and wrote my first novel, **Rivers of this Night**. It was a line I took from one of Wilson's poems. Seymour published a piece from that novel. That began it. I showed the manuscript to Andre Gide.

Q: This would be in 1950-51?

A: Yes. Gide read the manuscript and said, "If I were you, I would not show this to anyone else." It really was devastating. I went back and worked again and showed him another manuscript. He said, "Look, you will be a writer. Writers have to develop thick skins. This story is not bad; it has some flashes. You still have a long way to go." I sent a lot of things to the B.B.C. "Caribbean Voices." Then I went to Holland and was in Amsterdam for two years. There was an artists' club and I became an honorary member. In Holland I helped to edit a journal called *De Kind*. In that magazine I did a special edition and brought in poems by Wilson and Cy Grant.

Q: Was all this before you went to England?

A: I went back and forth to England, but I never liked it at all. I was a British subject, or maybe you should say a British object. I finally realized I had to go to England to work. I went into the Olivier company as an actor. After the Olivier season I went down to Guyana. Wilson and I went up the Potaro. On that trip the cook in our party, Herbert Stockman, would tell me stories which were seminal material for *Black Midas*. Wilson put in his interpretations too. So between Stockman and Wilson, I left with a manuscript, which was going to take me five years to unravel and fictionalize. The echo of these fellows was more of an impediment than anything else. I wrote about four versions of *Black Midas*. Then there came a certain point when I began the fifth version of *Black Midas*, and from the first few sentences I knew I had really mastered this craft of writing. I was in the middle of all sorts of things when *Black Midas* was being born. My first wife and I had broken up. Just then I met Sylvia Wynter. Sylvia and I were about to be married. On the bus I met Jimmy Burns-Singer, the Scottish poet, who was also a critic, writing regularly for the *Times Literary Supplement*. Jimmy said to me, "What about this novel you are supposed to be writing? I'd like to see it." The next day he took it to Secker and Warburg, and Warburg read it and wrote me a letter accepting the book. That moment changed my whole life. So I finished *Black Midas* and I am always sorry I did not do the full novel, because in the manuscript it was twice as long as the book which was published. *Black Midas* was a tremendous success. Jimmy Burns-Singer reviewed it on the front page of the *Times Literary Supplement*, with a big headline. Then Kingsley Amis and John Wain went out of their way to attack me personally because Singer was saying that the finest writing was coming from outside England.

Q: So you were associated in the minds of those critics with V. S. Naipaul?

A: No, Naipaul was nowhere in the picture. Lamming had just published *In the Castle of my Skin*. That was in 1953. Selvon had published, and Vic Reid's *The Leopard* had come out. *Black Midas* was really a kind of nexus for the West Indian novel, giving it a much broader public attention. Then *The Wild Coast* was snapped up by Secker and Warburg, but I had written it before *Black Midas*.

Q: After **Black Midas** there was **The Wild Coast**, **The Last Barbarian** and **Green Winter**, the trip to Moscow. Those books came out rather quickly, and by then you were an established writer.

A: Then there was a fallow period--I know writers always like to find excuses for fallow periods--but I really was fed up with humiliations, dealing with publishers.

Q: One thing I see in your work is the Caribbean or Guyanese subject of **Black Midas** and **The Wild Coast**. The themes are large, but the subject matter is Guyanese or Caribbean. **The Last Barbarian** seems to go outward in subject matter, taking in New York and speaking for black, Third World, oppressed people. There is a widening of the subject matter, coming from a colonial context to a wider international context. Now, you have become a spokesman for victimized, black, Third World people. Is that just a natural consequence of not living in Guyana anymore? Is that why you see things from a wider context?

A: I think that is partially true, but it also has to do with personal choices. Take someone like Roy Heath. We grew up together in Agricola. Roy remembers every single detail of life in Guyana, after forty-five years away from it.

Q: Why do you think it took so long to come out?

A: It hibernates. It takes a long time. You cannot get away from something you are so deeply rooted in. My own experience, my own intellectual growth, is such that I am best at living in a wider world. That is good. I really like travelling.

Q: There is a lot of your own experience in **Black Midas**?

A: It is someone else's story. I was not Sharpe. **The Wild Coast** is my most autobiographical book. The boy was myself. Then in **The Last Barbarian** Don is me, but I found the character unsuccessful and unsympathetic because I hated myself so much that I could not create a wholesome image of myself in the character. I disapproved of Don as I was writing. Then **Green Winter** goes off into writing about someone else's experience into which I could put some of my own experiences. Now I think this has crystallized. I can plumb that experience.

Q: You will write an autobiographical novel?

A: Yes. I am putting it in novel form. Everything I do gets to that form. That history of Grenada is really a novel, taking history and its facts and putting it in that form.

Q: We are speaking of forty years of writing and thirty years of being published, from 1958 to 1986. You have seen West Indian writing appear and be

established. How do you feel about those early years when Harris and you would talk? What are you feeling about our literary history in the last thirty years.

A: I think that this is a great period in the history of Guyana. The criticism of our literature, which is fundamentally anti-colonial and aims at liberating a colonial imagination, has never caught up with that nexus or upsurge. They are putting it into contexts that are askew. Criticism has to understand the eruptive force of the anti-colonial movement. "The anti-colonial movement" almost sounds like a cliché. This is not exactly what I mean. I mean this awakening of a human spirit, this feeling when I went with Cheddi into the countryside of Guyana, when we setting up the Youth Movement for the P.P.P., and I could hear the peasants talking poetry to me, or I can hear Martin Carter reading his poems in the car by lamp at night in the Canje, and the people talking back to him and talking back poetry. All these things were phenomena. If you did not live through them, you would not know.

Q: Do you think literature gave expression to the political feelings of that period in the early fifties?

A: Yes, it has some apprehension of the power of this upsurge through Wilson Harris, through Martin. It does not matter what direction they go in now. It was the times which spewed them out. They go in all creative directions of the compass. One of the things is that, being from Guyana, we are in Latin America. The Latin American imagination feeds on exile without losing its kind of creative force. But in the English-speaking Caribbean there is something that goes wrong in exile. English-speaking Caribbean authors do not have the same umbilical binding to roots that the Latin American authors have. Well, of course one makes that theory, then you think of Roy Heath who has been away for forty-five years and goes back with that meticulous detail into the psyche of the 1930s in Georgetown. It is unbelievable.

Q: But I would have thought the best writing by our best writers is about their home experience. Naipaul's best book is *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

A: And the short stories.

Q: *Miguel Street* is fantastic.

A: --Because in it there is still a kind of tenderness and compassion in the middle of the satire; there is a great warmth and feeling. He wrote about B. Wordsworth. He was in love with the character, the poetic spirit. I agree with that completely in that sense. However, what I am trying to say is that I am more rooted in Guyana after forty-five years, through certain experiences which entered my psyche, and framed the language that I use and the images I carry. You cannot get away from that, no matter how many places you go to. What you must learn in this long, painful period, is how to see everything else in the world through the spectrum of this, and sometimes the mirror is

blurred. You can't see through it, and the two are separate things, so you have to struggle to bring them together. It has never really been done before and we the Third World writers, all of us, are humanizing the process. When Ernest Hemingway writes about Africa it infuriates me. He is using Africa as a kind of Hollywood epic background, and his characters are parading against this backdrop. In a way, when Forster is writing about India, India is just an exotic backdrop. India is not India. They do not know the dreams, the hopes, the deep roots of that Indian psyche, which only an Indian can know. When Mulk Raj Anand writes a story, even a bad one, it is still better than anything those fellows have written. He understands the people. The West Indian experience has always been a very eclectic experience. Uprooted from the four ends of the earth and dumped there, we have not really come to terms with synthesizing all the crosscurrents.

Q: When you think of all our writers, Sam Selvon is probably the one who has worked most consistently with that local experience, plumbing it all the time. Living away from that setting as you have done, as Sam has done, how can you be true to that experience? You say it is still energizing your writing. But what would a young Guyanese think of you now? I have lived outside of Guyana for almost thirty years--less than you. Yet I see a difference between myself and younger Guyanese.

A: That is true. But I think the great question is one of being true to yourself, ruthlessly assessing who you are, where you stand, what your experience has been. I realize I am alienated from those younger generations in Guyana, at certain levels. But there are still other levels. When a young Grenadian comes to me and tells me that he read my book and it moved him tremendously, that is because I am still in the same area. It is not possible for anyone else to do that, to bring it back to the fold. You lose some things. I lose essences of the smell of the earth and the dreams of the people in a very contemporary sense. What they are thinking now often baffles and surprises me. But I am coming to terms with it. There is not one of us who does not carry in his heart a desire to go back. But there are not the conditions to go back.

EDNA MANLEY: "You Touched My Life"

BY NESHA Z. HANIFF

I met Edna Manley in 1981 when I was working on *Blaze a Fire*, a book about outstanding Caribbean Women. We took to each other immediately; our relationship, while intermittent, was marked by a genuine appreciation of each other. Our conversation was always open and personal. It always puzzled me that my obvious admiration flattered her so. She was recognised and accomplished, and certainly did not need my recognition. But at some point I understood that I represented a new generation for her - I had turned up on her doorstep insisting on her significance for us. Of course I was totally in awe that I had a friendship with a great woman.

She was, and still is, a source of inspiration for me. Her life was a struggle against debilitating rules, breaking them to create new ones. She left four different art schools as a young art student because she found the view of art at the time stilted.

I couldn't stand the method of teaching art you see. I just couldn't. You had to draw from antiques, and draw perfectly and work from still life and I just didn't think that was art as far as I was concerned at all. And I was right because I moved and moved and moved until I found a marvellous teacher at St Martin who understood me and I could understand his discipline. I stayed with him and I always felt he really believed in me.

I was impressed anew every time with her artistic sensibilities. It was her essential characteristic. Arthur Seymour recalls that when she came to Guyana she said "Oh Arthur, you have such enormous skies in Guyana. You know in Trinidad and Jamaica you have mountains blocking the sky, but you have such enormous skies here."

And it was the light and the sky and the beauty of Jamaica that captured her the moment she set eyes on it in 1922.

When the boat parked, if I may put it that way, there was a fantastic sky, flaming, reflected in the harbour. I thought ah, you know, this is it.

A woman whose every fibre was art could not then just arrive in Jamaica and be an artist. Here she was, a respectable married woman with a baby, and instead of understanding her place, she chased after the exquisite scenes of the market place in Mandeville.

Well I turned Mandeville upside down, they thought I was something out of a book. I wore an orange jumper and then went out and sat on the market wall and watched the market women coming in. I was fascinated and this woman was sitting selling these strings of beads and from that *The Beadseller* came.

The Beadseller is her famous first sculpture which has been acclaimed internationally. Her husband, Norman Manley, was at that time busy establishing himself as a brilliant lawyer and she had her second son, Michael, but still she was an artist who had to carve. The environment for an artist in Jamaica at that time, and particularly an artist of her ilk, was very hostile.

It was a very lonely life for an artist, and I struggled on and people that saw the work ridiculed it. They made me feel awful, and I smashed something because of what somebody said, but slowly I fought through and I went on exhibiting in England.

This is another example of her going against the current. Here was a woman who was not ambivalent about her work and her marriage. With her two children, she returned to England to continue her work. This in the 1920's and 1930's was a radical thing for a woman to do.

The Edna Manley then who became the mother of the Jamaican art movement had already waged battles for her own identity. Next it was the battle for a Jamaican identity, a Jamaican art. She, of course, could not stay away from Jamaica.

By the time I came back, I made a decision that I would not exhibit abroad anymore. It was a concrete decision, that such as I had a talent I was going to exhibit here, I was going to set a pattern and take the knocks. I felt that anything else would have been purely escapist, it wouldn't have been any value to me.

It was then that she started *Focus*, a political and literary publication, and decided as a sculptor, to carve as a Jamaican for Jamaica. These decisions and acts impacted the struggling artists of the time, and at the centre was Edna.

It was that time that we had the great showdown with ourselves. We had some good poets. They were writing about snow and daffodils and things they'd never seen and so we would have these terrific quarrels and tear up each other's works. It must be rooted in Jamaica, or at least the Caribbean, the climate of it, the fauna, the mountains.

These sentiments were embodied in her sculpture *Negro Aroused*, which was bought by public subscription in 1937. This act marked the official beginning of the Jamaican art movement.

It was tremendously important to me and I was touched to tears over it. If I had sold it in England it wouldn't have had the same effect but my people wanted it, my people had subscribed. This was what mattered.

Edna Manley stopped sculpting for seven years after her husband became Premier in 1955. It was the only time her artistic talents were placed in the background. Her relationship to Norman was critical to her survival as an artist in Jamaica.

I'm the luckiest person you see, he had no respect for people

if they had taken on work and didn't put the whole of themselves into it. He found my work a release and in a way we stimulated each other, we kept each other alive.

Norman Manley died in 1969.

In Jamaica, the artists Edna Manley and Albert Huie are household names. This woman who was Michael Manley's mother and Norman Manley's wife is recognised by the Jamaican people as an artist. What an astounding thing. I suspect that Edna would have it no other way.

The last time I spoke to Edna was in December 1986. I knew she was ill and was in trepidation that she was fast fading away. To my surprise she was doing rather well and we had a lively conversation. Somewhere during that conversation I was deeply moved by the fragility of her health and her life, and said

Well I just wanted you to know that you have touched my life and I am grateful.

A Goodly Heritage, A Review By Nesha Z. Haniff

Elma Seymour's book, *A Goodly Heritage*, an autobiography, was written basically for her children and friends. These are the memoirs of a woman from a middle class family who became a school teacher, married a poet, had six children and pioneered a nursery school.

As a student of women in the region I find the book a testament to the work of women's lives, and we are fortunate that Elma Seymour took the time to write her autobiography. Middle class Christian ladies like Mrs Seymour also helped to build the foundations of our societies. Here we see in the life of Elma Seymour that class was not at all related to money (she had very little) but rather to colour, education and family background; that those who were viewed as different or less were uneducated, less colonized, rural and black. Mrs Seymour had friends and colleagues of all ethnic descents, but they were of a certain type, educated and homogeneous in their values and status.

It is interesting to compare this reality of Guyana to my own. I have always argued that class was not a strong feature of Guyanese society mainly because I was not aware of it myself, but Mrs Seymour's life attests to its existence even though it was the experience of the minority. Still in the 1920's and 30's it was a very powerful minority.

I found the first part of the book very interesting and enjoyable. The vignettes provide a glimpse into the life of a middle-class family in Guyana in the 1920's and 30's. We see here Mrs Seymour's mother rocking one of her babies in her lap and one over her shoulder; finally she leaves for New York for a six-month holiday after her ninth child Joseph dies and does not return until ten years later. This was not a surprise. In the end Mrs Seymour's life and her mother's life were no different from all other women whose lives were determined by their biology. And Elma Seymour did not want to have so many babies, she wanted to pursue her career and afford the ones she did have, but the babies kept coming. For those raised and educated in Georgetown it was delightful to hear of the tram car and how the bicycle took on significance, how Maths and Spelling were taught, how the cinemas were organised, what the rules for friendship and courtship were, how the family was run (everyone, mother, father and children, had clearly prescribed roles) and how in this family religion was a dominant force. Throughout the book we see the origins of many predilections. The need to go abroad, the status of travelling, the place of England and the importance of the English men and women who ran Guiana and their relationships with the local middle class.

It is very sad that this book was clearly not edited or read as a whole. It is rife with repetition and often disorganised. This is one of the drawbacks of self-publication. It is a pity because the book is a document of the lives of certain kinds of women in Guyana, of the middle class family structure, and of the growth of primary education and the city of Georgetown. Mrs Seymour's writing reflects who she is: no nonsense, energetic, kindly and Christian. I would therefore like to see this book sometime in the future properly edited with photographs of the family and of the city in the 1920's and 30's..

Those who would read this book to find some new information about A.J. Seymour will be surprised. It is not the book of AJS's wife, it is the book of Elma Bryce Seymour, a Guyanese woman in her own right, an autobiography of a life of service to her family and to Guyana.

CONTRIBUTORS

- JOEL BENJAMIN - Deputy Librarian, University of Guyana; he has a Masters Degree in Philosophy and special interests as a bibliographer and bibliophile.
- NESHA HANIFF - U.W.I. Women and Development Unit, Barbados; author of "Blaze A Fire" (1988): the significant contributions of Caribbean Women.
- SASENARINE PERSAUD - Guyanese author of short stories, and poems; work not yet collected; has also written three novels currently under consideration for publication..
- FRANK BIRBALSINGH - Guyanese senior lecturer in Caribbean literature, York University, Canada; important promoter of West Indian writers.
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- JEREMY POYNTING - Senior lecturer in English, Leeds University; Director of the Peepal Tree Press; specialises in East Indian literature of the Caribbean.
- RON ROBINSON - Leading Guyanese theatre personality for 25 years; Chairman of the Theatre Guild in the 1970's; first active promoter of professional theatre in Guyana and Chairman of the Theatre Company of Guyana since its inception in 1981.
- FRANK THOMASSON - First Secretary of the Theatre Guild and then Playhouse Director until he returned to the U.K. in 1965; he directed a number of plays, on stage and radio, and was given the Best Producer Award in 1963; now lives in the U.K. where he and Carlotta (nee Croal) provide a "home away from home" for Guyanese; still active in the theatre.
- RAS MICHAEL JEUNE - Guyanese performance poet; has published collections of his work including **Black Chant** and **Church and State**.

THE 1987 GUYANA PRIZE

PRIZEWINNERS

The Guyana Prize for Fiction	Wilson Harris for Carnival
The Guyana Prize for Poetry	Fred D'Aguiar for Mama Dot
The Guyana Prize for First Book of Fiction	Janice Shinebourne for Timepiece
The Guyana Prize for First Book of Poetry	Marc Matthews for Guyana My Altar
Judges' Special Prize for Exceptional Promise	Rooplall Monar for Koker and Backdam People

At the Awards ceremony at the National Centre on December 8, 1987, at which President Hoyte presented the prizes to the winners, Wilson Harris in responding commented:

*This occasion signals and confirms the necessity for a serious examination of issues of creativity and cross-cultural innovation. Edward Kamau Brathwaite has stated in his new book **X/Self** that:*

Caribbean culture has been cruelly neglected both by the Caribbean itself and by the rest of the world.

In such a context of "cruel neglect" these prizes may have a remedial edge and they transcend the honour conferred on individuals. Imaginative writers may take some comfort from these proceedings. They are members now of a profession of the arts, it seems, though let them never forget such status has been long and painfully achieved within an indifferent if not philistine mental climate.

An expanded version of Wilson Harris' address at the ceremony, especially written for *Kyk*, will appear in issue No. 38.

