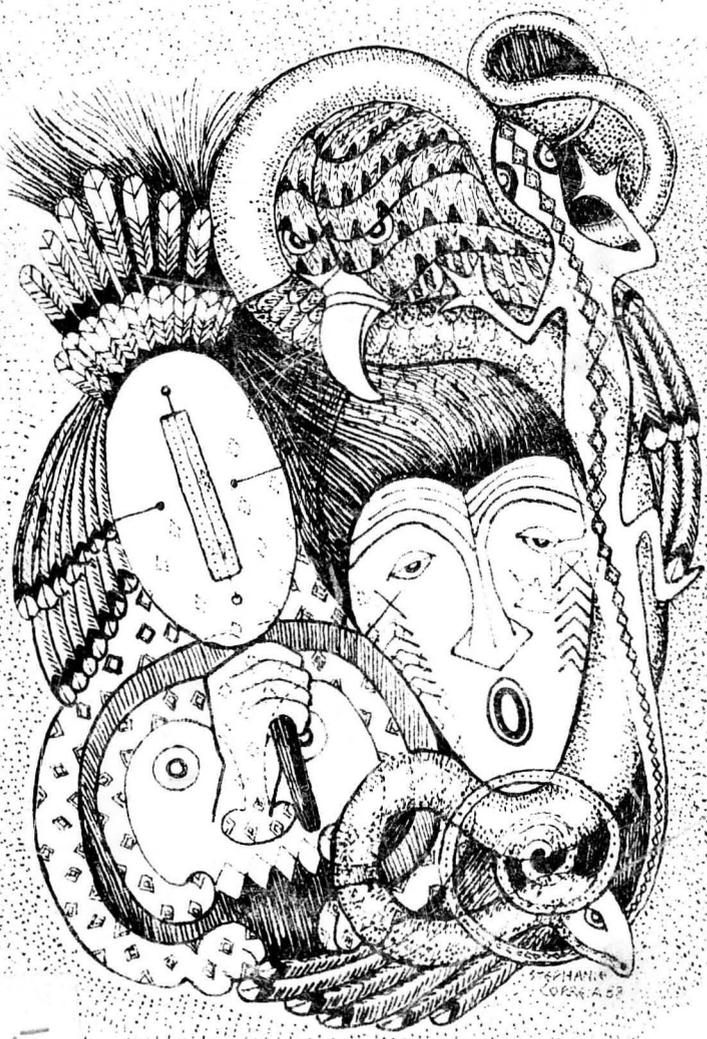




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CONTRIBUTORS

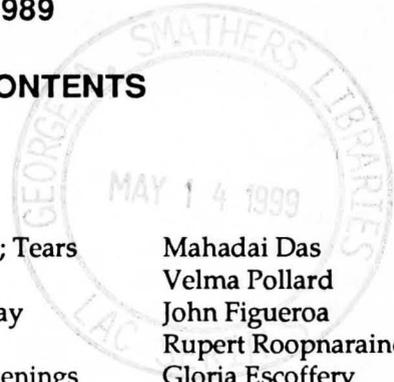
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Waverley Thorne 5.00

KYK 40— Edited by A.J. Seymour and Ian McDonald

December 1989

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ACROSS THE EDITORS' DESK

Where Literary Journals Have Counted

Milan Kundera, the brilliant and original Czechoslovakian author of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, wrote an essay entitled "The Tragedy of Central Europe" some years ago which I have just been reading. In this essay he writes about the subjugation since 1945 of "Central Europe" (meaning, principally, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary) by Soviet Russia. "The disappearance", he writes, "of the cultural home of Central Europe was certainly one of the greatest events of the century for all Western civilisation". He observes that this represented the loss by Western civilisation of a fundamental part of its own cultural heritage and he tries to analyse why such a loss appears to have been so lightly accepted.

It is a fascinating essay by a wonderful writer, especially worth reading in these Gorbachevian times. However, I mention it in *Kyk* for a more specific reason. In passing Kundera writes how profoundly the populations of these countries of Central Europe have been influenced by literary and cultural periodicals. For instance he points out that

the Central Europe revolts [in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland] were not nourished by the newspapers, radio, or television—that is, by the "media." They were prepared, shaped, realised by novels, poetry, theatre, cinema, historiography, literary reviews, popular comedy and cabaret, philosophical discussions—that is, by culture.

He also makes clear that by "reviews" he means

periodicals (monthly, fortnightly, or weekly) run not by journalists but by people of culture (writers, art critics, scholars, philosophers, musicians); they deal with cultural questions and comment on social events from the cultural point of view. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe and Russia, all of the important intellectual movements formed around such reviews. The German Romantic musicians clustered around the *Neue Zeitschrift Fur Musik* founded by Robert Schumann. Russian literature is unthinkable without such reviews as *Sovremenik* or *Viesy*, just as French literature depended on the *Nouvelle Revue Francaise* or *Les Temps Modernes*. All of Viennese cultural activity was concentrated around *Die Fackel* directed by Karl Kraus. Gombrowicz's entire journal was published in the Polish review *Kultura*. Etc., etc. The disappearance of such reviews from Western public life or the fact that they have become completely marginal is, in my opinion, a sign that 'culture is bowing out'.

Kundera says of Czechoslovakia in particular:

The weekly journal *Literarni Noviny*, which had a circulation of

300,000 copies (in a land of ten million people), was produced by the Czech Writers' Union. It was this publication that over the years led the way to the Prague Spring and was afterwards a platform for it. It did not resemble such weeklies as *Time* which have spread throughout Europe and America. No, it was truly literary: in it could be found long art chronicles, analyses of books. The articles devoted to history, sociology, and politics were not written by journalists but by writers, historians, philosophers. I don't know a single European weekly in our century that has played as important a historical role or played it as well. The circulation of Czech literary monthlies varied between ten thousand and forty thousand copies, and their level was remarkably high, in spite of censorship. In Poland reviews have a comparable importance; today there are hundreds of underground journals there.

Again, Kundera writes that when the Soviets liquidated all the reviews in Czechoslovakia after putting an end to the "Prague Spring",

the entire nation knew it and was in a state of anguish because of the immense impact of the event. If all the reviews in France or England disappeared, no one would notice it, not even their editors. In Paris, even in a completely cultivated milieu, during dinner parties people discuss television programmes, not reviews. For culture has already bowed out. Its disappearance which we experienced in Prague as a catastrophe, a shock, a tragedy, is perceived in Paris as something banal and insignificant, scarcely visible, a non-event.

It is astonishing—and depressing—to read such passages. They make one realise how utterly peripheral cultural periodicals in particular are in the life of our West Indian countries. The impact of *Bim*, *Kyk*, *The New Voices*, *Savacou*, *Banja*, *Jamaica Journal*, etc, etc, etc, on the lives of people is infinitesimal. If they all disappeared tomorrow that might perhaps create a small agitation in some narrow literary circles and some minor distraction in the sparsely cultivated groves of Academe, but nothing more. Can one imagine, without the hollowness of laughter, any of these periodicals mustering peoples' rage or love, influencing high policy, shaking bureaucracies, disturbing Governments, enlivening Establishments, or making "authority" stop and think for even one fleeting moment? The answer, of course, is a derisive no. We are "poets" to be patted, "intellectuals" playing games, "culture vultures" to be publicly indulged but secretly dismissed.

At one point Kundera writes of the West that: "Culture no longer exists as a realm in which supreme values are enacted". In our West Indian case culture never has existed in such a realm.

Yet, of course, we must go on.

Joel Benjamin—Guyana's Greatest Bibliophile.

The death of Joel Benjamin in February at the early age of 45 is the most tragic loss imaginable to these who love books, libraries, literature, Guyanese and West Indian historical research and scholarly investigations of all kinds. We wish to record the following extracts from a tribute paid to this young, but very great, Guyanese scholar at the time:

...In the larger sweep of a nation's life very, very few people are of any importance at all. Joel Benjamin was one of those few truly valuable Guyanese. The work he was doing was absolutely indispensable, completely irreplaceable. His work will be remembered long, long after the superficial achievements and daily headlined deeds of politicians, big businessmen, and countless public luminaries of every sort have sunk deservedly into utter obscurity. And I say this without even mentioning his role as the greatest Guyanese expert on the history of Venezuela's claim on Essequibo. Here, too, in a practical matter of the highest State importance, the knowledge he had is irreplaceable.

Joel Benjamin was Deputy Librarian and Archivist at the University of Guyana. But that does not even begin to touch on what made him and his work so valuable. He was, quite simply, the supreme authority on Guyanese books and documents and maps and prints. He was Guyana's greatest bibliophile by far. His whole life was devoted to seeking out, recording, cataloguing, preserving and writing about Guyanese history and Guyanese books and documents. When he died he must have been working on probably a score of projects to do with documenting Guyana's history, all of abiding value to generations upon generations of Guyanese. His mighty work-in-progress—his main life's work, his masterpiece—was a comprehensive, all-inclusive, fully annotated bibliography of all the works ever written about Guyana and by Guyanese. As a monument to him, if nothing else, this work must be preserved, edited, completed and must see the light of day.

...When one was with Joel the talk was never about the frustrations and anxieties of daily life or about the absurdities of authority or about the enormously trivial round of society gossip. ...The talk was about books, about Guyanese books, and his latest discoveries.

...In the weeks before he died he had visited me three times. The first time it was to discuss a brilliant translation that has just been completed of a book written about British Guiana in 1896 by the Portuguese Consul at the time, Adelino Neves de Mello. This book has never been translated into English and I was discussing with Joel the possibility of getting it published

with a Foreword by himself. He visited me the second time to see some old photographs I had been given of sugar estates life in 1912 which fascinated him and also to discuss the need to safeguard the historic iron windmill for manufacturing sugar dating from 1820 which still stands at Cornelia Ida in a reasonably good state of preservation. His third recent visit to me was to discuss the first poetry ever written in Guyana. I had found a reference to a book of poems about the Essequibo and Demerara called *Nautics; or Sailors' Verses* published in 1783 by an English sea-captain named Edward Thompson. Joel knew of Edward Thompson but had not heard of this particular book and was elated at the find. This led him to tell me about Guyanese poetry from the earliest times including our earliest known poems written by a man named George Chapman in the 1590's. We then decided that an article should be done on the subject for the next issue of **Kyk-over-Al**.

...Joel Benjamin was one of the most remarkable men I ever met. His life overflowed with delight and a sense of deepest satisfaction in what he did. And what he did was infinitely important to his country, to its history, to its heritage—to the nation's soul, if you like, since his contribution was to that part of the country which is immortal while the generations come and go. He was a very great, if largely unsung, Guyanese. It is essential at the very least that his widow should be given every possible assistance to protect, preserve, sort, update and publish his infinitely valuable work-in-progress as far as this humanly can be done now that Joel is not here himself to complete the job. And as I write that I distinctly hear him laugh: "Ian, you know the work is never done. There will always be that last find to make and annotate. Let me tell you about the time I was in a library in Texas....."

I hope heaven has old libraries. But, of course, it wouldn't be heaven without old libraries. And there, if you ever chance to visit, you will now undoubtedly come across my old friend Joel happy among the dusty shelves taking down an ancient volume titled "Guyana" with the light of discovery eternally in his eyes.

Joel Benjamin was an enthusiastic and always interested supporter of **Kyk-over-Al**. He expressed his excitement when plans were being made to revive the magazine in 1984 and extended his advice and assistance on countless occasions. Two of the best articles we have published in the magazine have been his piece on little-known Guyanese literature and his study of 19th Century drama in Guyana. It is nonsense to say that no one is indispensable. In Guyana he was. We at **Kyk** miss him terribly.

John Lee, Printer

We also record with great sadness the death earlier this year of John Lee, a Director of Autoprint. It is to Leyland Thompson and John Lee of Autoprint that we turned when the decision to revive **Kyk** was being discussed in 1984. They played an immense part in getting the magazine started again. They worked indefatigably with us in producing **Kyk** Nos. 30 to 36. We will not easily forget how they battled through the problems of blackouts, lack of paper, shortages, and machinery breakdown to help us come out with fair regularity. How once they scoured the town for ink when suddenly there was none and found somewhere a cobwebbed tin on some dusty shelf! They were particularly proud to be associated with issue No. 33/34, the **Golden Kyk** anthology. We will always remember, with a strange nostalgia, those long hours down at the old, dishevelled Autoprint office and printing works in Saffron Street discussing the next issue of **Kyk** with Leyland Thompson, always ready to look on the bright side, and John Lee, ever inclined to find the flaw, but both utterly dedicated to succeeding in the end. Leyland was the organiser, the business man, John Lee was the printer. Both performed for **Kyk** far beyond the call of their purely commercial duty. When we left them from issue No. 37 they wished us Godspeed.

We will not forget them. And let the name of John Lee, printer, find its place in the annals of **Kyk-over-All**.

“A Steady, Solid Kind of Delight”

Howard Nemerov, aged 69, holds the post of United States Poet Laureate Consultant, created by Act of Congress in 1985. The following is an extract from a report of an interview with him shortly after he had read a poem to a joint session of Congress celebrating its 200th anniversary:

Like his predecessors in the post, Nemerov strongly favours the traditional crafts of poetry—metre, rhyme, and meanings that can be elucidated by rational discourse. Pressed as to what it has meant to him to write technically such conservative poetry, Nemerov ponders, and says finally “I am writing more or less the way I talk. Think what a strain it would be to the way John Ashbery writes. “It may be John’s natural habitus of mind,” Nemerov says sweetly, “but I rather doubt it.”

This does not mean that Nemerov rejects the modern idiom in English poetry. Modernism, Nemerov says, “creates many more opportunities than problems. If you were to look at the **Oxford Book of English Verse**—the original one that Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch produced in 1913—You’d see that the last 100 entries or so were of a kind of meagre poetic precipitate

from centuries of poetry-writing, very polite, effete—in the literal meaning of effete—that is, the foetus has been delivered and the Mom is tired. Their diction was all full of poetic expressions like ‘crystalline, ethereal, refulgent’ and all the rest of that wonderful stuff. And it’s damn good that Eliot and others of his generations started something different, whether you like the results or not. Conrad Aiken once told me that he was very proud of a poem he wrote as an undergraduate that got a prize at Harvard because he mentioned cobblestones—and cobblestones simply weren’t in poetry at that time, 1915 or so.”

For Nemerov, the only legitimate purpose of language is to find sense and structure in the chaos of individual experience. Was he born a poet? Nemerov responds with another question:

“If it started there, how would you know about it? I suppose the reason we cannot remember infancy and early childhood is that we did not have language in which alone memory can be fixed. Otherwise, it’s just a succession of incoherent pictures, sounds, with no chronology, no scale to them. You can’t remember what came first and what came after. You just have these flickering visions once in a while. But until you have a fairly developed language, there can be no memory.”

Does he think televised images will replace language as the world’s primary tool for communications? “I think the easy answer is when you watch the evening news, turn off the sound and see what you get,” Nemerov says laconically.

“I receive in the mail three to five books of poetry a week which I haven’t asked for. And, once in a great while, you come upon something that makes you say ‘Yes, that’s something I wish I had thought of—not that I had done it, but that I had had the experience of doing it, which must have been such a pleasure.’”

“I never really worry about enduring,” he adds. “It’s so kind of—like being in the high-school yearbook. And with the change in fashion, the change in tastes, such as happens every five minutes now—this one may be elevated and that one may be degraded, and it doesn’t matter very much. As I was saying to (poet) Ben Belitt the other night: at our age, caring for is more important than admiring.”

What has his poetry meant to him? “At best,” he says, “It has been a steady, solid, kind of delight.”

“Reflecting the Difficulty of Living”

John Ashbery is a “difficult” poet. He has been dismissed as “one who never deviates into sense.” And he has been described as the person “now writing poems in the English language most likely to survive the severe judgements of time”. Whichever view you take, literary scholars, eager to confront “obscurity in its densest form,” are beginning to focus on him more than on any other living poet. Certainly he is delightfully provocative in some of his statements:

If you write a poem by taking the last line from every third chapter of each green-bound book on your shelves, and rhyming the last word of each with the first word of each fourth line, adding the name of a soft drink, an Aristotelian category and an expletive from the comic strips to every other line, you will have cunningly constructed a poem whose beauties are strictement litteraire.

In his perhaps less frivolous moments he makes statements like the following:

I’m interested in communicating, but I feel that saying something the reader has already known is not communicating anything. It’s a veiled insult to the reader.

And:

I feel I could express best in music. What I like about music is its ability of being convincing, of carrying an argument through successfully to the finish, though the terms of this argument remain unknown quantities. What remains is the structure, the architecture of the argument, scene or story. I would like to do this in poetry.

And:

The difficulty of my poetry isn’t there for its own sake; it is meant to reflect the difficulty of living, the ever-changing, minute adjustments that go on around us and which we respond to from moment to moment—the difficulty of loving in passing time...

I find Ashbery’s poetry generally baffling. But gradually as I read him more I begin to get the hang of him, if that is the right way of expressing a growing feeling of seeing dimly in the distance and darkness the light he is trying to throw on things. Here is one of his recent poems:

FEAR OF DEATH

What is it now with me
And is it as I have become?

Is there no state free from the boundary lines
Of before and after? The window is open today

And the air pours in with piano notes
In its skirts, as though to say, "Look, John,
I've brought these and these"—that is,
A few Beethovens, some Brahmses,

A few choice Poulenc notes.... Yes,
It is being free again, the air, it has to keep coming back
Because that's all it's good for.
I want to stay with it out of fear

That keeps me from walking up certain steps,
Knocking at certain doors, fear of growing old
Alone, and of finding no one at the evening end
Of the path except another myself

Nodding a curt greeting: "Well, you've been awhile
But now we're back together, which is what counts."
Air in my path, you could shorten this,
But the breeze has dropped, and silence is the last word.

A Dangerous Occupation

Stabroek News, which began publishing in Guyana in 1986, carries an outstanding weekly column which has greatly enhanced public knowledge of little known episodes and facts in the country's history. This newspaper also currently features a "Stabroek Poem of the Month." With permission we reprint the Osip Mandelstam poem and comment which was featured in the paper in April:

Writing can be a dangerous occupation as Salman Rushdie, on the run from the Ayatollah's death gangs, is currently discovering. Great writing is often greatly subversive. Throughout history powerful regimes, entrenched creeds, have feared the solitary man with a pen in his hand as much as they have feared an army of swords. Never was this more true than in Stalin's Russia. As Joseph Brodsky has written with restrained anger: "In educated circles, especially among the literati, being the widow of a great man is enough to provide an identity. This is especially so in Russia, where in the thirties and in the forties the regime was producing writers' widows with such efficiency that in the middle of the sixties there were enough of them around to organise a trade union."

Osip Mandelstam was the greatest poet Russia has

produced in the 20th Century. Because of that it was inevitable, given the nature of the regime that Stalin established, that he would be killed. Mandelstam himself always said that they knew exactly what they were doing: the aim was to destroy not only people but the intellect itself. And in Russia, among intellectuals, poetry has always had a very special place. As Osip Mandelstam's widow, Nadezhda Mandelstam, writes in her great book about her husband, *Hope Against Hope*: "Poetry is the golden treasury in which our values are preserved; it brings people back to life, awakens their conscience, and stirs them to thought. Why this should happen I do not know, but it is a fact."

The poem that led directly to Osip Mandelstam's death was written in November 1933. It was never published, of course, simply written and read "to eleven people all told" Mandelstam said during his interrogation. But that was enough. News of it got out. According to Mandelstam's interrogator the poem was "a terrorist act." Nadezhda Mandelstam, writing in the 1950's, makes the following comment on this: "From their point of view, M's was a real crime—a usurpation of the right to words and thoughts that the rulers reserved exclusively for themselves, whether they were enemies or friends of Stalin. This presumption became second nature to our rulers. Your right to an opinion is always determined by your rank and status in the hierarchy. Not long ago Surkhov [Editor of the Literary Gazette and, later, secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers] explained to me that Pasternak's novel is no good because its hero, Dr Zhivago, has no right to make any judgements about our way of life—we had not given him this right".

Osip Mandelstam was arrested on 20th May 1934 and later deported. Sometime in 1938, the exact date is not known, he died at the Vladivostok transit camp on his way to the even more notorious camp at Kolyma. He was forty-seven. Here, translated by Robert Lowell, is the poem that killed him.

POEM
by Osip Mandelstam

We live. We are not sure our land is under us.
Ten feet away, no one hears us.

But whenever there's even half a conversation,
We remember the Kremlin's mountaineer.
His thick fingers are fat as worms,
His cockroach mustache is laughing.

About him, the great, his thin-necked drained advisers.
He plays with them. He is happy with half men around him.

They make touching and funny animal sounds.
He alone talks Russian.

One after another, his sentences hit like horseshoes! He
pounds them out. He always hits the nail, the balls.
After each death, he is like a Georgian tribesman,
putting a raspberry in his mouth.

A Poetry Notebook

A book that should be read by anyone who loves poetry is Geoffrey Grigson's *The Private Art, A Poetry Notebook*, published by Allison and Busby in the U.K. One never tires of browsing in this poet's journal. Quotations one would like to share come on every page. Like:

The uncommonest thing in the criticism of poems is educated feeling—a readiness or willingness or eagerness to be moved, coupled with experience in language, or at any rate in words, as well as experience in how words have been selected and combined and projected by poets—poets of now and of the past.

New books of verse are reviewed in batches, as an editorial duty. But the books worth commending will always be few and isolate—in our language perhaps two or one in a year, or none for another two or three years. Lines ought to be quoted in the review, if it is not to be a meagre acceptance or dismissal. I've just watched a cheese-maker put his hand into a great stainless-steel vat of warm milk and feel the changing milk between his fingers and thumb. Knowledge of the substance. Out of the poetry vat a line, half a line, is generally enough to tell the experienced consumer if new verse is likely to reward him.

Edwin Arlington Robinson found a categorizing word for an article he had disliked. Someone or other, some well-placed nobody, had written "a drivel" about poems. A drivel is what the poetry-reviewers usually compose; not for the sake of the poetry but because the literary editor thinks he must now and again provide a space and a place for this ancient art; which hasn't the quality of spreading in extent of readers, at once, but only the quality of persisting, if it is good, in a long narrow strip of readership through time ahead.

Like:

Long ago poets used little of the world, then they used

more of it, intrigued by seeing it more clearly, then too much of it, then less of it again. But the mixture should now be about right, and they must still practise their art in response to living, loving and dying. Death, for instance, for the individual or those who love him and survive him is the same, whether it is death by a palaeolithic axe or by an electronically directed rocket, whether it is death in a chariot crash or a coach crash or a train crash or a helicopter crash. Just over a thousand years ago, to give an example which is not too familiar, Egil Skalla-Grimson wrote the poem which will be found in his saga, an old man, lonely, despondent, after all the activity of his life. His sons were dead, his god had betrayed him. Poetry, he said wasn't easily drawn any more "from the hiding-place of thought", but he composes, he mourns, and can say for himself, and for others, in conclusion:

It is bad with me
now, the Wolf, Death's
sister, stands
on the headland,
but gladly, without
fear and steadfast, shall
I wait for Hel,
goddess of death.

We are enough the same for that still to be a poem for ourselves, still to be a poem of a kind we are always going to need and to write.

Like:

I read that the T'and poet Meng Chiao wrote
'Bad poetry makes you an official,
Good poetry leaves you on a lonely hill.'

And so on and so enliveningly on.

Mahadai Das

We are particularly delighted to publish in this issue new poems by Mahadai Das. In May 1987 this young poet suffered a serious stroke which tragically interrupted her most promising career. For two years she has fought for recovery with the greatest courage. Now she is writing poetry again. The poems we have seen seem to us powerful and full of a passionate renewal of creativity marvellous to see.

1989 Guyana Prize for Literature

In 1987 the Guyana Prize for Literature was awarded for the first time. The standard of entries in both poetry and fiction was remarkably high. Wilson Harris won the Fiction prize (US\$5,000) for his novel *Carnival*, Fred D'Aguiar won the Poetry prize (US\$5,000) for his collection of poems *Mama Dot*, Janice Shinebourne won the prize for First book of Fiction (US\$3,000) for *Timepiece*, Marc Matthews won the prize for First book of Poetry (US\$3,000) for *Guyana My Altar*, and Rooplall Monar won a special prize (US\$500) for his book of poems *Koker* and book of short stories *Backdam People*.

The Awards Ceremony for the first Guyana Prize on December 8, 1987 was distinguished by a passionate and magisterial address by Gordon Rohlehr and was recognised as an outstanding and even historic event at that time.

Now, after the planned two year interval, the 1989 Guyana Prize for Literature has been announced and on this occasion a major prize for drama is to be awarded in addition to prizes for poetry and fiction. Conditions for the Prize have been issued, with a deadline for receipt of entries of August 15, 1989. Six copies of each entry, published between 1st June 1987 and 30th June 1989, must be submitted by publishers only, except in the case of drama, for which authors also may submit a typescript as used for production.

Stephanie Correia

The illustrations in this issue are black and white renderings, done for us by Stephanie Correia, of five of her paintings exhibited in the retrospective exhibition "Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana", April 1988. We cannot share with our readers the warm colours of the originals, but we are proud to show in these versions the artist's celebration of her Amerindian heritage. Each painting is associated with one of Stephanie's poems, which we print with it.

The poems are reproduced from the Red Thread publication *Arrows from the Bow* (1988), which in her graphics and poetry dwells on some of this remarkable woman's preoccupations: "ancient knowledge" including Amerindian folklore, the threat of cultural extinction, and the pottery for which she has long been well known.

PIAIMAN CURES

Shake rattle
Smoke cigar
Drink tobacco juice
Tie a hammock
For the sick one
Bring green boughs to hand.
Empty house
Lock door
Put the fire out
Total darkness, all is still, nothing moves about.
Shake rattle
Chant song
Hear the distant roars
Coming closer
Here they come
Now blood-curdling howls
Piai calls
Kenaima hears
Evil ones come in
Shout, whisper, roar, growl—terrifying din.
Winged things
All shapes
Coming through the roof
Question, answer
Different voices
Piai must know the one
Come, go
All kinds
Creatures—even human
Wax, wane—bump, thump, held by piaimen.
Circle rattle
Ever faster
Crystal fire
Sparks fly
Fight fire with fire
Blow smoke
Suck poison
Pull out spirit darts
Long night, piai cures, Kenaima now departs.



MAHADAI DAS

The Leaf in his Ear
(For Charlie)

Left, the golden leaf bears from his ear.
At eighteen, Bushman fighting to control diamonds
in his glass head. The waters of the river
swirl by.

I and I, Rastaman, with knotty India hair, has long ago, ceased.
The good Lord swallowed him up.
Into Guiana forests. North-west.
Dogs bark and howl.
In this first of May day, the Almighty is Rain,
voices, wind in banana suckers.

Lucky

Down at the bottom of the river, the fishes
swirl around his ears. Lucky hunts for gold.
Away from the teeming world of city streets
and crying wives, he meditates of God and his world.

The white man from England tugs twice
on the water-hole of his mask. Simultaneously,
God tugs Lucky. An electric eel, smoothly, snakelike
touches him.

A current moves like lightning
from the back of the eel's head to his ankle.
"Ouch!" is torn from my father's lips. He
swims frantically up towards shore.

Learner

I am the great learner.
I devour the apple but before that,
I halve then quarter
and eighth it.

I am a baby feeding on mashed yams.
I discover red apples and green ones,
small apples, large ones. Romanos.
Granny Smiths.

I have eaten them.
Flame in the gut. Like a Chinese dragon,
I hold horses I drive and I breathe fire.
Adam and Eve in one, I am in a garden
Eating. Breathing.
There are raspberries too, and bananas.
The banana-man sells me some.

I, oriental fire-dragon, mother Kali
in China, wrap snakes around my neck and
I the fruits, belching out ribbons of fire
into the snow-white prison to which I am
Relegated.
Bars are white hot iron.
Books encased in cartoons stand low
against the bars.

Tears

Bones of dew scatter on my plate
as they rain down the land.
How can I stop them. They splatter
through my dreams leaving me homeless.
Oh God! I am naked as a newborn
I implore you with my tears.

VIRGIN ISLANDS SUITE

I

DRAKE'S STRAIT

Half-sunken mountains
or half-risen plains
you choose the metaphor
or truth
this humbling moment
while the boat
slices the blue
between volcanic
pellets (the king of Danes had named them)
in this Virgin sea

But what of Drake?
Why is this passage his?
except to note his passing pirateing
from Tap Hus
to that sleeping Turtle
where his spirit still
in British English
over US coins
four centuries later
yet invites
Lord Nelson to come tumble up...

How like a toothless lion here
this Drake who with his
brother Hawkins
now mere names
put on our best designs
hobbles around
grand ancestor of terrorists everywhere
their job description
pirate bucaneer
naming hotels and beaches
teeming with those
other whites
who this time come
for other conquest
sun and sea and brown
shrouding their need
to conquer
and to own (?)

II
DRAKE'S STRAIT REVISITED

One Dumb-bread Boss
to go
and two bush tea (poured
from the coffee urn
labelled for local brew)

I'm here for Drake
to feel his passage once again
and wonder at the islets
sitting poised on either side
bright in the morning sea

I have seen ocean
I have ridden
rivers large like sea
but this that Drake saw
and Columbus saw
outawes them all

Islands in fold on fold
diminishing in green
becoming blue-grey
near the farthest edge...
Sometimes they cockpit in the sea
and merge from
island into islet
islet to island
ring a ring a
rosing round the boat
spitting its white foam
on the startled blue

And I see bellying sails
Columbus laughing
at the helm
naming these islands Virgenes
sure in imperial faith
that he and not the Taino
names the scape
This journey surely
was the fairest of them all

The Danish king
who called these islands pellets
did he sail this sea?
he didn't even send
his language
down this way
why would he sail?

Empire fragments
Tortola Virgin Gorda
and St. John
are holding hands
wrapped in two different flags
brother and sister
islands here
uneasy neighbours...
Uncle Sam patrones

These truths
are sacrilege
that come unbidden...

Rain clouds gather
darkening fast
and force us down
into the viewless
belly of the boat

III
DRAKE'S STRAIT REMEMBERED

After the Virgins
all seas all oceans
seem unreasonably bare
The Atlantic
Los Angeles to Santa Barbara
with only Catalina sitting there
At home
after Port Royal's blade
a few brief cays
and then the empty sea

Volcanic beauty
jagged edges
merging into
hilltops that were
beaches where the Taino played
wild blues of deep sea
gentle grey-green hills
marking horizons
that can shift and change
as yonder becomes here
under the helmsman's hand
rocks you can almost touch
that stand and speak to rock
and islets bobbing
out of nowhere
to become
a green girl in the ring
tra la la la laa

Earth and the sea
they know their business
change is not distress
here only beauty now
and calm

A WEDDING LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY

Here we come gathering
nuts in May, nuts in May
on cold and frosty mornings

a cup of tea and slice of bread
a cup of tea and slice of bread

on cold and frosty mornings

At Louise's wedding in Jamaica
we played those games, played those
games at Louise's wedding.

and here we chop off your head
and here we chop off your head.

In Jamaica what to make
of cold and frosty mornings?
In Jamaica what to take
with cup of tea and slice of bread,

and London Bridge was falling
falling down so merrilee,
at a wedding falling down,
falling down so merrilee,

and when they "chopped off your head"
you fell on the family carpet
beneath the starapple tree,
a captive pressed for tug-of-war.

I stepped on Louise's gown
as she sailed up the aisle,
my fellow page and I
distracted as we carried her train.

a cup of tea and slice of toast
on frosty English mornings
can't match cousin Louise's style
gliding along the sacred coast

of controversial matrimony.
Games they say prepare us
for adult life. Like London Bridge
is falling down, falling down

and here we chop off your head
chop off your head on cold
and frosty mornings.

And what
of the starapple tree, and carpet
bearing wedding guests
posing on a saffron afternoon—

all our tropical patrimony?

We live abroad, and gather moisture
in May, beneath a milky moon.

RUPERT ROOPNARAINÉ

EXTRACTS FROM 'SUITE FOR SUPRIYA'

XXII

The shawl you draped across my bed last night
Went to work with me today.

In the middle of a conversation
About grand motions of the world,

A slowly gathering sense of you,
Hair in the wind,
Bright red beret on a grey London street.

I stroked the gorgeous shawl of golden stars
And resumed my considerations of social motion.

XXIII

The 8.16 from Chelmsford to London is no place for poems.

A young man in the corner of the carriage
In city uniform, reading Trollope.

A windswept woman in a thin raincoat
On the seat opposite with haunted eyes.

Sudden memory of dry winter leaves
Rustling crisply in a high wind.

I lie awake listening to a mighty winter wind
Gusting through the fields of Essex.

Fire in the grate, near silent fields,
Long black hair spilling across my face.

Baudelaire knew there was magic in a head of hair.
He is known to have voyaged far on its waves.

When your hair spilled across my face
The 8.16 from Chelmsford to London
Weighed anchor, lurched and set sail upon
The improbable sea, rocking in time and space.

XXIV.

Shadows are companions of light.

A cave, a fire, men in chains, and sight
Dimmed by distance from the blaze of truth,
Image of thing confounded with thing in itself.

Could even far-seeing Athenian have seen
What long shadows our love would cast
And how grim grottoes of the world
Would burn bright and brighter as it passed?

XXV

Get up and leave at once. Wear a coat.
There is ice in the wind outside.

Pack a bag. Make yourself beautiful.
Don't forget to bring my gifts of books.

Second thoughts. Forget the coat.
The sun in my heart will defeat the ice in the wind.

Leave the bag as well.
We will have no need for clothes.

Make-up and jewels can stay on the bathroom shelf.
Your eyes unmade glow like Arabian lamps.

As for the books, abandon them.
The books of our love will write themselves.

Just come at once.
The pavements are hard and there is ice in the wind.

XXVI.

At the desert's end a sudden stream,
A crystal snake curling across the sand.

Across the shimmering back another desert begins.
Clean rippled waste stretching into a consuming sun.

On the surface a canopy of lily-leaves,
Upturned parasols, lilies for handles,
Under which red-tailed tilapia play
Undisturbed by the spurwings
Tip-toeing on the roof.

Wise ones say the stream is so deep
Even deserts cannot cross.

What great river mothered
This surprising stream of golden light
Where two deserts end?

XXVII. (For Yuli Daniel)

I know now that a poet died that day.

Then, high above the ancient stones
Where slaves stormed imperial Rome
Wretchedness seemed part of the general ruin,
The waste of separation in time without end.

I think now that the bones of the poets
Deep in the Roman earth
Were singing sad songs of home-coming
For the soft-throated bird that fell
In the Siberian snow.

He died of exile.
Perhaps I was touched by their songs.

LETTER FROM GILBERT

"Greetings, sister. Here's to a festive season spent
rethinking the landscape with your brush.
Don't forget to mention it was the whiskers
of grandpappy hurricane that brushed your cheek.
I left a few green kisses on the panes of your studio windows
as memento of my frolic.
Apologies for the single window frame that remains jammed
because of my brainstorm.
Long before it shrinks to normal
you'll be busy as usual, I know.
Okay, so I upended your breadfruit tree
and snapped the poinciana trunk; that vain summer bloomer
you shot with your camera had it coming to him.
Must admit I littered the floor of your tidy woods
with froufrou from the breadnut tree.
Forgive! Forgive!
I knew you'd go on working unless the roof blew off,
so I spared the roof.
It was the pimento tree, not I, that punctured the zinc sheets.
As one about to wind down to a quiet ending,
I salute you—Sister... Eye-of-the Hurricane."

POST GILBERT EVENINGS IN THE DARK

Round the dangerous, tamed bookshelves,
Liberty's "home sweet home" carefully held aloft and stinking,
I edge my way.

This is a straight chair, this is an armchair;
here is the coffee table where I think I rested the flashlight.

Kings and queens have tutored me in patience.

On their longevity, testing the odds against myself,
I stake my sanity.

Two kings triumphantly cover their queens;
I reel out the cards, careful not to cheat, or miss an opening.
The hierarchies, fumbling and shamed
by their inadequacy scramble back into the pack
regardless of degree.

Twos, aces, minions close to the throne, all are equally disgraced.
Fate denies their need for separation of suits and clinches
my disappointment—or strengthens me to meet it.
For tonight there will be no omen signifying
"by this time tomorrow... Lights! Lights!"

I have been alone so long
the orchid baring its lip in slow motion
grimaces in reverse;
the botany book pitcher plant
spits out the pip of a housefly.

That whitish salt dip from which my toe recoils
is, I recall, a slug facing extinction.
Even its last juices have turned to body juices.
Outside, under the stars, a liberated spirit
Pulls itself together for the jubilant march towards slug heaven.

MCDONALD DASH

INDIAMAN ON PARK

Old

Old, weary, weaving Indiaman
snowpeaked, greybearded
from far beyond the headwaters
of Mother Ganges; migrated spirit
far removed from the monkeys and
chupatti and spice, the Calcutta
Express

Crosses Park Avenue in heavy warming
garments—

Grey greatcoat that old Haig would
have coveted; vermilion scarf standing
in the icy wind, sometimes;
Yellow earmuffs (ochre to be polite)
cover burnt-brown ears, Hmmmm.....
a granddaughter's gift bargained
from a sarishop somewhere in
JacksonHeights

Old Indiaman crosses Park Avenue
just so much ahead of a thousand
fuming, straining yellow cabs waiting
on the green

Old Indiaman crosses on WALK
All so slowly

IN BLASTED OPEN-TOED SANDALS!!
With the windchill factor at
FIF-TEEN!

Oh, obliterated mind!

Relentlessly, purposely, he
gaits on, sometimes slack,
sometimes hoppity-like
the sidewalk is a hard, unyielding
opponent... Hunting, I thought for
an exotic recall

The mind meandered on the Avenue
and then

Ah, here it is my good chap

400 Park Avenue.. AirIndia!

Wer good. Wery good indeed!

Oh, ecstatic state! Mind altered

by conjuring scent of spice, cardboard

dancing girls, ruby belly buttons

Polo-ponies and golden turbans

Little girls' heifer-eyes

Old Indiaman with heavy enfoldments,

open-toed sandals, will soon soar

higher than AirIndia's jumbo

as soon as he can get out of the

blasted freezing rain, sahib

Oh my God!

IMAGINATION

Lord Jesus, now may we
Explore reality
And by Thy mighty power
Learn things as they are

As we now humbly kneel
Our joy and love we seal

Lord Jesus, we implore
That Thou increase our store
Of images of grace
We seek to learn Thy face

We gather heart and will
How best to serve Thee still
So bring into our mind
The understanding sign

To overflow our cup
Gather our loved ones up
In reverence and pity
As they too seek for Thee

Images we create
That open Heaven's gate

Oh, images we make
By power from Thy dear sake
To worship thee how best,
That is our greatest test.

TRANSLATOR

1

You have been to Santo Domingo
(you said): you talked to the people,
lived there for two years

How you enjoyed the life—
it's more than being in Canada
where it's so often cold
(people, climate, etc.)

Jamaica, Barbados; Central Americ
next—no word about people
ekeing out a living
from the barest minimum

The light in you burns
brightly (once again,
all is well).

2

North/South: the talk continues,
this need
you say you will return again
to enjoy more of the sun

dwelling longer & becoming
tanned to a bronze state;
melding with sand, soil,
leaves & waves: all echoing

in your ears, beneath your skin
(shrimp, mollusc)
body's heat, heart throbbing

This eating of the best,
This sharing is greater:
the poor will continue to live

with this language at heart—
translate one more time...
out of love (if you will).

POWERFUL

**Control of the source
means control of the power**

**food security
you've got to produce
what you need to consume
freedom from slavery
is in self sufficiency.**

**they will feed ya
when they need ya
then for their own wicked intentions
put ya through starvation**

**food security
for sureity
freedom from slavery
is in self-sufficiency**

**control the source
feel the power.**

FOR MARTIN CARTER

Mothers—moons &
mandallas

In search of water
a caravan of famished
clouds
refuge across sky's
desert.

while moon's insistent
ministry
plead against a wall
of reflection under
Sun's authoritation
administration.

Seas mothers and moons'
wounded consciousness
generates a healing
love
from mandallas potent
centre
Informing a perpetual
drama
as magical as dreams.

Here on this triangle
verged of a motion-less
Pegasus
waiting for Pan-man
I travel through a
mid yard time of space
between
mudfloor
pailing
upon dried sinews of
trees
treading into a
backyard of housed
dreams liberating
spirits' delicate voice
praises and passion
seas mothers moons and
mandallas.

Martin:
Elder voicenet caster
whose full catch feeds
sermons of fullness,
flesh
and fantasy real as
fish
drawn from memory's
methaphors
tatoed on stone's
experience of death—
birth unveil
a face of renewal
beneath this sky's
meager mask
reveal a cliché
horizontal in
circular simplicity
Seas mothers moon and
mandallas
women wives womb
watery indicator of
fire.

Missy loss missy loss
Missy loss she gold
ring

Fin' ahm
Fin' ahm
Fin' ahm
let we see.

She was moe dan
jus' he mudda
she was a mudda to
all awee
Midwife time delivers
from man's womb chest
a season of children
shouting REMEMBER
REMEMBER
punctuating dominoes'
clattering chatter
Sin tacks
At Tacks
house racks
High jacks

Litty stones on D-
Floor.

She ova canje watta
time take she way
she ova canje watta
Bow-man guide D-way
She ova canje watta
time take she way

Captain captain
pull she to shore
Itanami cyan fraid
she no more
rocks are water
rapids a shore
pass the bush Dia-dai
guarding life's
treasure
behind Rorima's
cereous door
Dis time na long
time
Dis time na now time
dis time a time before
seas and mothers
moons and wives
wombs and water
Love's dual centre
idea of life's primary
rival
confessing communities
to an embrace
tight as fists clenched
in prayer
from moon mothers and
mandallas, like bangles
dancing the air.

FROM TIMBER PARTY

Let the timber-spotting-party
Tramp uphill and turn off the trail
Into untouched strands of trees.
Let them find enough of greenheart
Or wallaba or whatever to
Import a mill
And set up their complex.

At any rate let me reverse my course
Detach myself and go alone downhill
To test my fear.
I sail over huge cracks in the
Forest floor,
I skip over deadfall and tremble pass
Snake holes
Clutching the advised cutlass
Down to the valley

Down to the swift creek
I relax and let the diamond-blue
Butterfly flicker processed sunlight
To my eyes.
The speckled leaves meander softly
From straight sun-spattered trees
Down to the dappled ground
And the soft sounds of illusive silence
Whisper that the cutlass in my hand
Is a manufactured good.

At any rate
If a snake should come—
A brother on the trail of
Self—
He would be no more evil than
The serpent of my mind!

WHEN SCRIBES WERE SAINTS
(for the late Joel Benjamin)

Rodney, Burnham
Whatever, whoever
They came, they make big noises
They go, not even as
Hygienically as piped tobacco
(never mind it's unlit)
And how much did Raleigh
worry in the tower
And paint on paper,
Undone deeds
Unknown adventurers?

Now I set off
for Sanskritic OM
From mouth to mouth to
Ages Vedanta
(they come—Mongols, Macedonians, Mughals—
they go)
remains because (quietly -i-) recorded
Anonymous
it is all

I come
I go...

THE CROCODILE

Hair cut brutally short, a Gauleiter's
Look, eye patched with velvet black.
The one blue eye, beautiful but cold,
Searched and found and fixed you
An irritating fly held and pinned,
Specimen ready for display.
"This boy", quiet, curled gash of lips
Snarled. "This boy", the whole class frozen:
I found the blue eye worse than licks,
Scorn is the great cruelty of schools.
"This boy", menace rising in the throat,
He jingled small change in his pocket
Ominously, the esses hissed:
"Who thinks the simplest word to use
Describing groups of men at arms..."
The pause lasted until youth was done...
"Is expeditionary force! Good, grieving God,
One word, boy, one word I said
And you give an essay pages long!"
Unsure laughter, cold eye swept the class,
Fear knotted in the stomach's pit
Worse than a bully's fist, the mind tormented
Stuck, still the cold eye grimly
Waits for answer that will never come.
"Army" haunted me for weeks unending.

Is that the way to teach? Fear
And cold, unsparing threat?
It seemed not then, and all the books say no.
But forty years have gone, vivid
In my mind he stalks his victims still.
I learned, I learned, by grieving God, I learned:
Books became my friends by force
And what he said was best in books
Became my ally in a survival course.
He hated adjectives, pretentious words,
Colour, anything that makes language gleam
Or had the least romantic touch.
"Clean your sentences, the muck and dirt
Is worse than on your filthy hands!"
Clean! I think only of a sentence clean.

Forty years have passed. I meet again
This formidable man, this "terrorist" of boys.
The iron hair now silky white, neatly brushed,
The pirate patch still there, ice-cold eye grown dim.
The years have clearly drawn his teeth:
Confident, I tower over him
And cannot quite imagine it.
He extends a shaky hand, not rising from his chair.
"You've done well," he says. "I could have told".
The softness in the voice I do not recall
Deepens the sadness of how the years unfold.
"To teach a boy, you must know very well
Who will be strong enough to crucify.
I liked the way you fought me back:
Plain sentences I could never make more plain!"
A certain crookedness in the lips, old crocodile,
Make the years roll back, I glimpse the snarl
Of certainty that what he taught was right.
Lacking clarity, nothing could atone:
All the flesh of language he removed
Leaving bone, no decoration allowed,
You wished to polish, well, you polished bone.

HAMMER MAN

Me searchin', but I ain't findin'
Me walkin' but ain't meetin'
Tiredness overtakin' me
Weary body
Losin' energy,
Searchin' but I ain't findin'
I feel as if I meet the end of di worl'
ware all de sorrows and pains buil' up
just waitin' on a Hercules to fetch it
but sorry, sorry I can't make it
Me body weary,
gettin' sleepy,
foot a burn, head a hurt me
Me searchin' but I ain't findin'.

Walk up in Sout', I see a sign
Tell meself Oh God is time,
I really try hard
suh I run in de yard
Rap on d' door, long hair woman
peep out.
"Sorry sir, already gone,
don't forget to close di gate."
I stare at she and start to wonda
den me rememba
Me hair ain't strait
Oh God these demons testin' me fate.
This man with the hammer in he hand.

Come from Sout', walk in Tucville
Out a Tucville to East Ruimveldt
Sarch whole of West
ain't teking no rest
searchin' but ain't findin'
walk down Cemetery Road
see LeRepentir
the dead in them house
lye down quietly
and me walkin', a livin'
mash up and weary
can't stop meself to show lil envy

I could hear dem dead pe'ple
laughin' me
That I searchin' and ain't findin'.

Crawl into Lodge, meet Durban Street,
Walk out to Regent, the Middle Class
street,
Come out to Regent,
into Vlissengen
step into Queenstown
lookin' like a clown
dem Queen and King watchin'
like they want to shoot me down
me throat dry, dry, want lil water
But then me remember
this is Big Shot area.
Searchin' but ain't findin'
I frighten the man
With the hammer in he hand.

Amble into Kitty,
into Campbellville
through Subryanville
Back to Kitty
dead tired and weary
Searchin' but ain't findin'
Ole people does say
seek and you'll find
but all I findin' is how to seek
and find plenty worry
and swell up feet
Me searchin' but I ain't findin'
a frighten the man with the
Hammer in he hand.

Is night time now, me have to go home,
Hungry and break up, crawling alone
walking but ain't meetin'
But meet meetin' me
for God help me
and I meet home,
But I see plenty people stand round
starin'
they sayin' plenty things but like I ain't

hearin'
I squeeze in me yard
Raise up with shock
look in front, look at di back
chair, table, bed all on the ground
and a whole set of clothes scatter around
I red with anger, me start to bawl,
Me wife and six children
on the dirt, sitting down,
"Pearlie, Pearlie, wha happen gal?"
"You can't see, you can't see,
he come John with the hammer in he hand
and he say he ain't comin' back
no more."

ISLAND DAY

Coral.

Rock.

Sandstone.

Feel the words on your tongue.

Coral.

Rock.

Shell.

Shells.

Sea-shells.

Hear the surge of the surf on the Bathsheba beach,
the ebb and the flow of the tide of our hearts.

Shell.

Rock.

Wood.

Driftwood.

Piece of mahogany smoothed by the sea
brown bathed in blues everchanging
turquoise to ultramarine.

Rock.

Wood.

Tree.

Coconuts fringe the shore where the sun rises, their leaves
rustling in the wind.

In the fields of St. Philip the cotton flowers are yellow;
the scent of the balsam clings to the breeze below Cliff.

Coral.

Rock.

Earth.

In valleys green with cane the soil is black
and red is the clay on the hill.
The earth turns like the potter's wheel
and long is the labour of man

in the cane-fields edged with khus-khus grass whose roots smell
sweet as the juice of the cane
in the cane-fields edged with pea-bushes whose flowers are yellow
not the yellow of the cotton flowers,
or that of the crocus which grows in the ditch

in the towns
in the factories
in the banks and the stores and the offices

in the towns
where the roar of traffic cannot drown
the sound of typewriters in air-conditioned rooms
the sound of telex-machines and cash-registers
the sound of the making of money.

On the top of a cliff in St. Lucy
an old man smites the ground with a rod of iron
digging crabs for bait.

Another old man climbs the cliff with his burden:
a bucket of sand.

St. Peter was a fisherman
and home the ice-boats come
"Fish! Fish! Four for a dollar!"
And all along the coast
ice-cubes in tourists' glasses
tinkle now their Angelus.

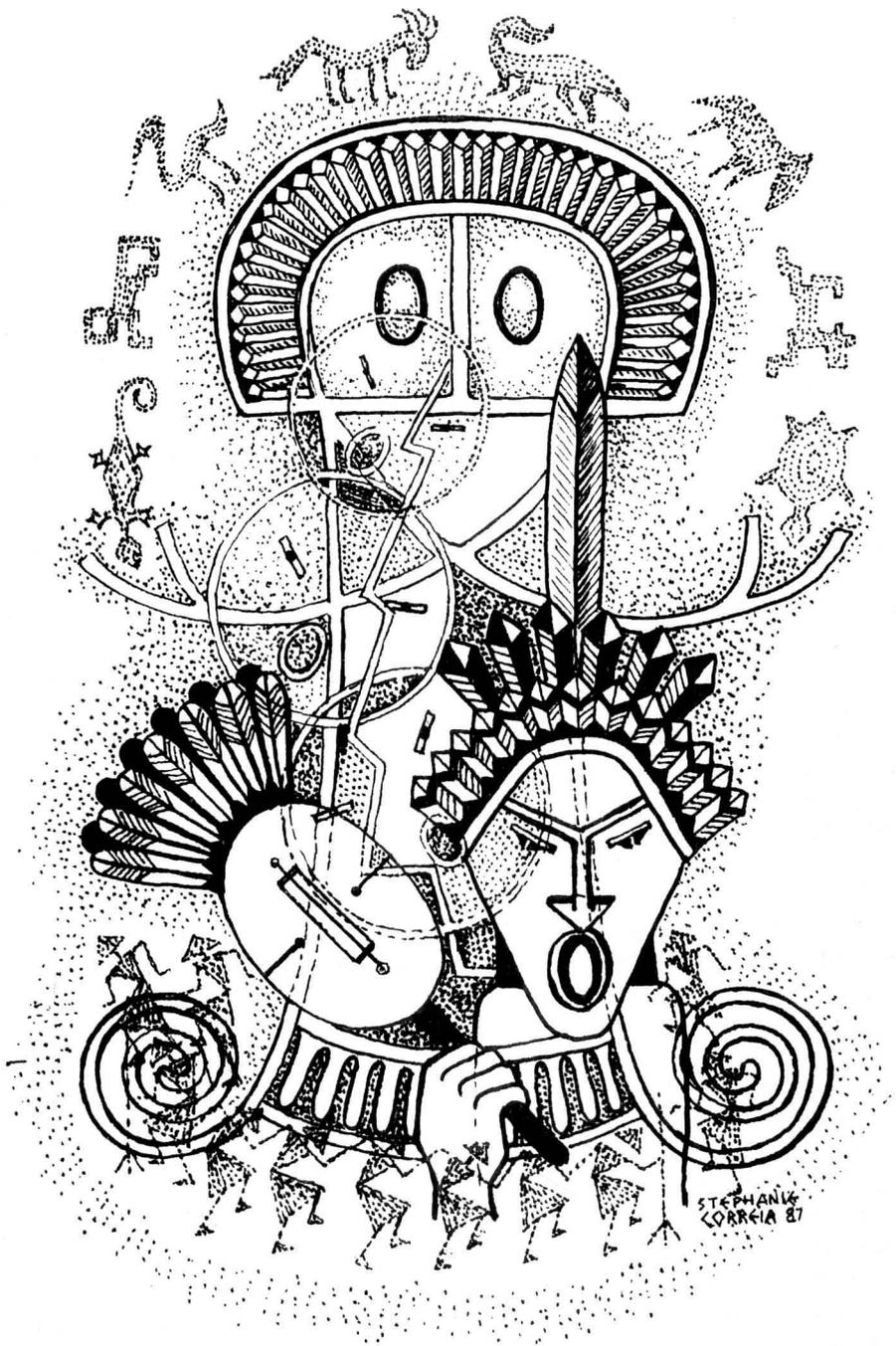
A piece of rab land in St. Thomas
brightens with the flight of grass canaries
As the sun sets
golden in glory
pinking the clouds
warriors binding their wounds in the night.

CHANT TO EARTH MOTHER—I

Spirit fighter, sacred rattle—
Fashioned by me from a perfect calabash—
Four mouths to face in all directions,
A crown of brilliant feathers, carrier of crystal fire
To fight the evil ones. I, only, hold the power
To shake the rattle, chant the song
To use the instruments ancestors left me
To guard, protect and heal the people of my tribe.
Ages ago it seems since first I learnt this lore
Understanding secrets, spirit growing ever stronger,
Bitter years of fasting, self-denial—a child when I began
To walk this testing road, for I am piaman.

And now true testing time has come
Feathered, fierce-eyed, painted warriors await
My word for a successful hunt.
For first I must go down to underworld
To parley with Earth Mother for the souls of animals
Now gather round, my people help me,
Bear me up with song and dance and ritual
As I embark upon my perilous journey.
Drink the 'kari, beat the drum, move in sinuous rhythms
Rattle shaking ever faster, tobacco juice, my long cigar;
Ancient incantations rising, falling, chanting endlessly.
Earth shackles break, as I rise up my spirit now set free.

(Continued on Page 70)



LAW AND ORDER

by Roy Brummell

"Alright, all you don't mean to listen to me, eh? God send me to talk to you all people bout you wickedness an you all laughin me? Take care when I go back an tell He what you all doin! You all know that He don't make joke. He is a man, He take long to get vex but, when He get vex, He don't care who He throw hot tar on. So long I beggin all you to come to me an tell me what you all do; so that me can ask The Father to spare you all, but is like stick block up you all ears hole. Alright, God goin to burn out them stick quick time; so you all goin to hear me loud loud, like when thunder clap on a zinc roof!

"Some of you think that God appoint me for joke, eh? Well all you day of scorchin brimstone an fire waitin for you all right on you all bed! Don't say I didn' warn you all. You all remember how them people laugh that poor old fellow Noah? Some say he mad. Some say he stupid. Some say he is a stupid old ass. Then God say: 'Alright, Me send this man Noah to put sense in all you head an all you laugh he an mock he? Alright, I goin fix you all up.' So He let go rain like if he mad an drowned them, like when you tie a big, heavy rock stone round a dog neck.

"Alright, you all laughin me? God go pour down he fire an burn all you like dry grass. Go on, pass an don't stop; pass an ignore me. I talkin to you young woman with that baby in you hand. You passin me straight an go, like if me is some bush without a name. Alright, go on; go an take more man an get more baby. An, by the way, that baby is God own. You hear what He say: 'Suffer the little children to come to me, because all have sin an come short of the glory of God.' Is what you sayin there? Me talkin stupidness, how a lil baby can sin? Well, the bible say that the sin of the parents visit the children. So what you tellin me bout me wrong, you must know what sin you did doin an make it visit you chil. Alright, go on, you cursin me, when you pass back you goin to have another sin hug up in you hand. Go on, you man waitin on you round the corner, for you all to make more sin.

"Eh? You goin to lock me up? That is why me don't like police. You all got the thief man them, and the murder man them, an the whore woman them, an the wicked politician them runnin wild all over the country, an you comin an tell me that I disturbin the peace, an that you goin to lock me up! You all police is a pack of jokers, but me is God police. An if you dare to put you hand on me, I goin to put me knees down for you, an make God rotten off you hand! If you know what good for you, you better jump on you bicycle an fly out of here like race horse! ..."

Was the old man at it again. Was not nothing strange he talkin; years now he talkin it. He don't mind that nobody don't stop to listen to he; he just blastin the air an the sky with he explosions.

He was not a very big old man; in fact, if you take off the over-size jacket

an pants, the old man was rich skin an bones. That is what make people use to say that the jacket an the pants weigh more than he. But all the old man weight in the noise he does make. He had a half steel drum an a big, long stick an, when he ready to preach, he does lick the drum, like when a man tryin to smash up something. He idea, though, was just to let the people know that God messenger about to rumble. An rumble is what he good at! All he heaviness in he voice! It don't matter how much car an truck an motor bike pass, you could hear he voice flyin high above them. The more they pass an disturb he, the more he switch on he volume.

Nobody don't know nothing bout the old man. He just live at the spot where he do he preachin. He preach there the whole day an sleep there at night, an he own the spot. Was a spot in front a popular rum shop in Stabroek, Georgetown. He choose he spot, because it opposite the Stabroek Market, an the market area always got hundreds of people goin up an down, shoppin or catchin bus. Then again, he does get a chance to go in the rum shop an preach on them man inside there.

If it rain or if it shine, the old man goin to be at he spot, with no hat on he head an no shoes on he foot; all he got is he over-size jacket an pants, an he half steel drum an he big, long stick. When it rain, it wet he an, when it hot, the thick jacket an pants melt he. He don't want no shelter; all he want is to belt the people bout they sins. He so want to clean up the country, that the people call he "Law an Order."

On the same day that Law an Order curse the young lady bout takin man, an the policeman bout the police not doin they duty, he get heself in big big trouble. A man pass by Law an Order spot an the old man take off on him: "Look at he. You just got to look at he face an tell that he is a pussy cat. Me hear they openin a special thiefman court to fix up all like you an them that thief from the government. Them takin long with this court though, like if they only talkin, talkin, talkin bout it. Whoever settin it up, like he is a defender of thiefman, an so he draggin he backside on it. But don't friken though, God goin to scorch you all tail with a whip singin with fire an brimstone mix up with hot oil. When He throw it on you all, it goin to peel you all backside."

It didn matter to he, that the man was a well-dressed man, who just park he fancy car an step out. He didn care how official the man walkin with he stomach in the air; he just want to beat he for he sins.

The man was, in fact, a high official, an he didn expec nobody to talk to he that way. The words shock he like electric. Law an Order was not a man to laugh or even smile but, when he see what happen to the man, he laugh loud an say: "You jump, eh?" Then he snap out the laugh an say: "Me ent really laughin though; you hear what the proverb say: 'All skin teeth is not laugh?'"

The man get back in he car quick quick, but he had a little time to glare at the old man an shake he finger at he. Law an Order tell he: "If you know what good for you, you better go you way in peace."

The man frown up he face an lef. Ten minutes later, a policeman come an tell he got to move, because he abusin people. The old man tell the young

policeman that God put he there an only He can move he. The policeman say that he don't want no trouble, an threaten to lock up the old man, if he don't move. That is what really get the old man wild. He say: "Lock up who? Lock who up? Man you is a lil boy an they send you to do a man work. You run go back an tell the man that send you to come heself an bring the whole police station with he."

The policeman never meet a old man talk like that, an he say he better take the old man advice.

Law an Order know that trouble comin; so he start workin he brains for a plan. He know that he goin to need the people on the streets to help he, but he know that that ent goin to be easy. Was no point takin he long stick an beatin the drum BANG! BANG! BANG! He try that for years an it didn work.

Was a man smokin a cigarette pass an set he brains alight. Fire! He goin to use fire! Not too far from he spot was a place for garbage, full with paper an all kind of thing, an that was what he use. He borrow a match from somebody an scratch it on the garbage.

Now, Georgetown people run to go see a fight or hear two people curse each other. They run when they hear that somebody got a party. They run, if somebody got a sales. They run to meet a dead man. But, as soon as they see a lil smoke, they fly bird speed til to England to see the fire! So when Law an Order light the fire, you should a see the speed they fly with to go an see what wrong! Man, before you could count ten, hundreds light around he spot! Then he start to preach: "You all ever hear this bible verse: 'And they shall all be gathered to Jerusalem, like chickens under the wings of a hen?' You all ever hear it?"

Some hear it, but still it shock them. This was not one of Law an Order topics. It sound like something new an they got to listen.

"What you sayin Law an Order?" somebody holler. "Tell we what you sayin."

The fire he light didn really come big; it only smoke a lot, because some of the rubbish was wet. Anyhow, he take he big, long stick an beat the smoke to death. Then he say: "I sayin that I got a dream to tell you all."

Something had to be wrong with the old man, for years he beat them with fire an brimstone, now he talkin bout dream! They brains tickin to hear this dream an some of them bawl out: "Man, you got a dream to talk, talk it an let we hear fast," "Law an Order, you workin dramas on we." "Talk quick man; talk quick."

He raise up he big, long stick, like if he about to clap it on somebody, but that was just to silence them. "You all know that the bible say that the young man them go dream dreams an the old man them go see visions? Well, that is what happen to me an me son. This happen years ago, but me never tell you all, because the time was not ripe. But now the time come...One night a long, long time ago, me son dream that a star shoot down from heaven an land in a city of pure gold. The people there did wearin white robes an black robes, with red cords round they waist. When the star land, them people with they black robes bolt, like when a lil boy go to fire a brick on a dog an the dog see he an melt. But,

the people with they white robe, run to meet the star, singin the happies hymns. Suddenly, the star start to climb up to the sky, an them people with they white robes start climbin, too, like if they get wing...

"When me son tell me this story, I say he make it up. But you all know what happen?... The very nex night me see a vision! Me see it so plain, it friken me! Me sit down in a rockin chair studyin God word an me drop asleep. Two minute after, out of the blue, I hear a voice say: 'Wake up an look!' So me fly out me sleep like a new spring. An you all know what happen?... I see the words: 'GO NOW TO JERUSALEM' flash in front of me. You all know what that mean?.."

Was then that the young policeman come back with a corporal. The corporal didn come to talk talk too long. He stick he finger in Law an Order face an say: "You is under arres."

Law an Order say to he: "By who authority you come to arres me?"

"In the name of the laws of Guyana, me come to arres you."

"Guyana law? Guyana law, eh? You go an talk to God an let he send you to arres me."

Was time for the crowd to take over. They burst out laughin loud loud, you could hear it all over Georgetown. They didn like how the corporal tear through the crowd like a welding torch, an they didn like how he talk to the old man neither. "You is a pig, eh?" somebody holler. "But what make this police don't go an let he mother learn he manners," another say. "If me was you father, me would a cut you backside good an proper," another one bawl. "You all policeman only big an strong, you all don't have no brains," somebody else say.

The policeman didn mind what they say bout he didn have manners, but they didn got no right to say he ent had no brains; so he scramble the old man to carry he away. That make the crowd mad an they start to boo. Then they begin to threaten an move in on the policeman; so he let go Law an Order an say he goin to bring the whole station.

"Alright, we want to hear what you been sayin," some people holler out.

"Yes, we was talkin before that wild hog come. He lucky I ent cut he backside with God rod. (He raise he long stick. Laughter). He don't know who he playin with; I could beat he flat like snake. (Laughter).

"But me been talkin bout the vision. The star that me son see was Jesus an the writin that me see, tellin me an everybody to go to Jerusalem to meet Jesus, if we want eternal life. All of you here now who want eternal life got to go to Jerusalem. (Some sniggers). I want to see the hands of all who want to go to Jerusalem. (Stifled laughter). Wait wait wait, nobody don't want eternal life? (Loud laughter). You all rather to stay here an eat you all plantain an cassava, eddo an orange, rather than to go to Jerusalem to get a chance to go to heaven to live on milk an honey all day long? (Louder laughter). You all laughin me? (More laughter). Me preachin God word an you all laughin me? (Laughter and the crowd begins to break up). Alright, all you go, God go lock all you up in the lake of fire for one thousan year! He go pour fire on you all, you all go think is firewater! He goin to burn you all with fire, like when you get a cut an you put salt in it! An don't think you all goin to holler: 'O God got lil pity on we,' because

that is when you goin to hear He say: 'Look how long I beg you all to listen to me, now is the time for me sweet vengeance.' God go burn you all an laugh, because you all laugh when He send me to warnin you all. He go make a special fire for you all. Go from me, you all goin to roas in everlastin fire! Go from me, you all curse unto damnation! Go from me!..."

He would a gone on an on, if the police corporal didn come back with ten strappin policeman. They really come to learn the crowd some manners, but Law an Order laugh an say: "Eh eh, is all of you come to arres me? Man you really talk to God."

A lot of people, includin them rum man in the rum shop near the old man spot, see when they gone with he but, was not til a couple minutes later, that the people move. The official man that Law an Order did preach on, drive up in he car, an pay a lil boy to throw way the drum an the long stick. The lil boy was jus about to do it, when a man come out the rum shop an take away the stick. The official man fly in he car an speed away, but the man lick the drum, an bring out the other man them, an a lot of other people. Without a word, everybody know what they got to do. One man pick up the drum and the other man got the stick an, the two of them leadin everybody, with a BANG, BANG, BANG, as they headin for the station.

DRAGLINE AND SHOVEL

by Hemraj Muniram

The old man squatted comfortably astride the two planks in the red corrugated iron latrine, and regarded the brown trench water below with a look of contentment. Outside, the three o'clock sun crippled trees and the vegetable gardens around the logies which sprawled carelessly about, east of the sugar factory.

The sun always shone mercilessly on Friday afternoons, the old man thought indifferently. It had been so in India during his youth, and it would be so after he would have died, been buried and forgotten, he concluded.

The old man washed himself with the Ovaltine can of water he carried into the latrine, dried his wrinkled hands on his khaki pants as he fixed himself, and emerged from the latrine with a sigh of relief.

He was wrinkled, but not shaky, and with a strong tobacco-hoarse voice he beckoned to his grandson who was also defecating on the dusty embankment of the trench. A mossy green rum bottle containing water stood beside the boy.

"When yuh grow mo' big, yuh go use latrine like me," the old man said. "Yuh mustn't 'fraid ah trench. Me and me shovel-gang pardnah dem dig dis trench. Wid bare shovel and bucket. An' dem blackman slave befo' me time dig all dem trench in dis estate de same way."

The boy washed himself, dried his hands on his shirt, and wiped his eyes with them as he straightened up.

"Run home an' put on yuh pants. Me gat fo' colleck me pension ah pay-afice," the old man said.

The boy dashed away and, in patched short pants, quickly rejoined his grandfather. They moved off, the old man's hand on the boy's shoulder, passed the scattered and uneven clump of logies bundled among fences of oil-drum covers and box-boards, passed Sankar's rum shop from where a juke-box blazed Indian music, passed the small Presbyterian school which the boy attended.

Suddenly, the boy said, "Look! Look!"

The old man directed his attention to where the boy indicated, and noted curiously a swelling mass moving helter-skelter in the vicinity of the market square.

"Mus' be somebaddy wild cow in de ma'ket," the old man said, but realized he was mistaken as he very soon noticed a noisy yellow monster approaching nearer and nearer along the dusty burnt-earth main road of the sugar plantation.

Women dressed up in white and coloured headties scampered with their baskets to the safety of samaan trees nearby. Market vendors shifted their merchandise in panic onto the grassy parapet alongside the road. Workers who had just collected their pay-packets abruptly transformed their smiles and happy chatter into looks of puzzlement. Everyone gaped in awe at the unusual-

looking crawler-wheels of the yellow dragline, at its shiny bucket dangling menacingly from its long ladder-like boom, and at the heavy crashing sound it made every time it canted over pot-holes and bumps.

"Go back home," the old man advised his grandson. "Me go bring sweetie fo' yuh. Leh me hurry an' colleck me pension befo' deh close de pay-office."

From the boy's eyes water trickled onto his suppliant face. He was allowed to watch the dragline as it headed purposefully towards the factory compound, and then he ran homeward.

At the pay-office voices sounded bewildered and eyes converged on the yellow dragline, now parked and surrounded by gleeful white estate personnel in short khaki pants, knee-high socks and white bowler hats. The old man felt a hand tapping his shoulder and turned around to face Mansingh, his only son, who belonged to the shovel-gang.

"Eh-eh, son! Ah wha' dah?"

Without replying Mansingh pulled him by the elbow towards Sankar's rum shop, where the dragline's arrival was the topic of conversation.

"But up to now ahwee nah know wha' dat t'ing name. We only talkin' 'bout it an' gettin' no way," said Chunilall, a cane-cutter living next-door to Mansingh in the same logie.

"Mus' be fo' fetch cane. Yuh see how dat big shiny t'ing open out in front like 'e ready to grabble somet'ing," suggested Sankar, the rum shop proprietor.

"Dis is serious talk, man. No time fo' jokes. What yuh t'ink, Mansingh?" asked Chunilall.

Mansingh did not answer. He simply gulped down his rum, fingered his glass and looked at it as if expecting the answer to appear from within. Now and then he waved off a fly doggedly attempting to settle on the glass.

"What happen, man? Yuh nah talk fo'de whole aftahnoon. At least tell ahwee wha' dem chaps in yuh shovel-gang seh," urged Sankar, his hand rubbing his big balloon of a belly. Sankar always drew smiles or laughter or positive words from people whenever he spoke. This time, though, Mansingh merely glanced at him, then at his shovel and three-tiered food-carrier beside his chair, then at Sankar again.

"Have nutting to say," Mansingh said.

At that moment Ganraj the book-keeper walked into the rum shop. Sankar greeted him with a vigorous clap on the shoulder and a schnap of gin.

Sankar said, "Mistah Ganraj, you is a educated man. Help ahwee out."

"Is nutting really big, chief. Is only one stupidly moto' t'ing confusin' ahwee lil bit," Chunilall said.

"You mean that yellow dragline that...?"

"Wha' yuh call am? Dragline?" the old man interrupted. Like his son Mansingh, he was noticeably quiet at the table until then.

"I tell yuh-all de t'ing gat a stupit name!" said Chunilall.

"DRR-DRAGLINE! Heh-heh-heh!" Sankar rolled.

"Yes. Dragline," Ganraj confirmed.

"But wha' dis dragline fah?" Chunilall asked.

"Many things. Dig new trenches, dredge blocked-up trenches..."

"Drains too?" Mansingh asked.

"I think so. Drains also." Ganraj the book-keeper flicked another schnap of gin into his throat.

"Same blasted t'ing me bin t'inking," Mansingh said angrily. He reached for his shovel. "Look hey," he continued, "dat t'ing hangin' in front de dragline shine just like dis shovel."

"That's the bucket," Ganraj explained.

"Dragline gat bucket too! Nevah hear anyt'ing mo' stupit!" Sankar said.

Mansingh felt like plunging a fist right up Sankar's bloated belly. He said, "No wandah dem scampish backrah overseers nah want fo' pay we mo' money in de shovel-gang. Me suspek is some scheme dey up to."

"Your suspicions were not unfounded. That dragline may usurp the functions of the shovel-gang. It's economical, and faster too," Ganraj said. He was not understood and understood at the same time.

"Only dis aftahnoon me tell me grandson, Mansingh son, how all dem trench dig wid bare shovel an' bucket. Look how t'ing does happen," the old man said.

It was raining when they left Sankar's rum shop at nightfall. Drunk and bitter, Mansingh and the old man managed to cross the sludgy path to their logie without difficulty. At home, Mansingh failed to notice the kerosene lantern on the shelf and his son sitting expectantly on the wooden string-bed. He failed to notice that the floor was freshly daubed, as were the fireside and the plastered partition that distinguished bedroom from kitchen.

The old man sat cross-legged on the damp earthen floor and smoked his strong tobacco. He said to his grandson, "Betta, tomarrah me go buy sweetie fo' yuh. Me fo'get t'day."

"Ole man," Mansingh said, while he slouched about the floor. "Why yuh lef' India, eh? Dis place no good. Backrah man have no sympathy. Yuh used to be shovel-gang man. Now me a shovel-gang man. Wha' go happen to me life from next week? Only shovel-gang wuk me know."

Mansingh staggered towards the little boy, fondled him by the neck, pointed an unsteady finger about his face, and said, "Son, promise me yuh go study yuh school book hard. Promise me yuh go be mo' bright dan Ganraj de book-keepah. Yuh go use mo' big words dan he."

The boy shook his head up and down obediently.

Mansingh joined the old man on the floor. "Pa, seh somet'ing nah. Yuh gat mo' experience dan me. Yuh nah feel sarry fo' yuh only son?"

The old man hugged Mansingh and they both wept. Then he stood up. "Listen carefully to me," he addressed Mansingh. "In dis heavy rain factory watchman bound to sleep away. Ahwee gat fo' tek action now. Right now. No machine can wuk wid salt an' sand. Ahwee mus' stuff up de dragline engine wid salt an' sand. Hear me?"

"Yes!" Mansingh approved excitedly.

With two battered galvanized zinc buckets, a shovel and a torchlight, they

stealthily prepared a mixture of kitchen salt and sand in the logie yard. The rain did not let up.

Heaving his bucket out of the yard, the old man felt a stinging pain in his chest. Mud squelched under his feet as he led the way alongside the trench over which stood the communal red corrugated iron latrine. Dizziness broke out in his head and his heart let loose a torrential beating. He stopped by the latrine. His hand lost hold of the bucket and his legs crumpled under him.

Mansingh nervously focussed the torchlight on his father. The old man never saw that light.

DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU STAND

by Rooplall Monar

Every goodam night, soon as Bertie done settle in he lonely bed like one night owl, he mind does flash straight at he wife who staying in New York. He does turn ravenously mad like a bull. At that moment he could strangle he wife if only she appear in front he eye. And don't matter how much time Bertie try to shake off she image, she image ain't going away. Like she image haunting he as though she image turn one spirit. Mocking. Leering at he. Is like a nightmare.

Some nights, he wife image does stay in Bertie head like a weight while Bertie straining he thought at different things, different sights. Is real torturous when you hear Bertie talk about it. Yes! is like something hitting Bertie forehead tap tap all the time, and this Bertie could explode bodom any moment. Sometimes, Bertie does feel he eye playing tricks with he. True! is like he seeing he wife visage flitting on top he eyebrow.

As Bertie does tell them boys soon after he guggle down two Banks beer glup glup: "If you know what passing thru me mind". Then he eye does turn red. And if it happen that he glimpse a woman or a young girl walking in the street, she hip swaying like one duck behind, he would feel like rushing at she, place he finger between she thigh and squeeze she thigh until she bawl for murder. As though he want mince-up the woman patacake.

"Is the patacake which give woman spranks!" Bertie does talk whenever he get pissing drunk. "Without that, tink woman would play they ass with man?"

Other times when Bertie in a sober mood, pacing the house like a lonely, neglected man, he eye registered with a far-off look, he does feel like smashing them furniture in the house to bits. He mind does recall far-far things. He heap all the blame at heself. But he never know New York would swing he wife head. Yes! he couldn't fathom that the glitter of New York would be a magnet on he wife senses.

"Is like never see come to see!" as old folks does say.

One midday I walk in by Bertie place to borrow he hammer. The village was a bit sleepy at that time of day, and the sun been want stifle you. You could imagine the agony them plants and grass passing thru in the backyard. When you ponder on the Guyana heat you does recall some young girls' words: "I only praying to land in New York or Toronto. Think I want this sun burn me? Spoil me beauty? Make me turn black like coalpot? Eh-eh! you ain't see how fair and rosy some blackskin girls come. Must look at them when they back-home on holiday in Guyana? Can't believe you own eyes! Guyana!"

Yes! like the blasted sun does turn most young girls colour-complex. Especially them girls with tailor-made figure, fairskin and cock-out behind, walking the street as if eggs stick between they legs. They eyes flitting like butterfly, lips curl in scorn whenever they spot them boys by the street-corner

playing cards, and throwing a wicked wink at them... True! you going to believe them girls want spit at them boys, or trample them like horsefoot on ants.

Never know why New York and Toronto is like a craze among Guyana young girls, I mean those living in me village.

Yes! as I been telling you. Soon as I enter Bertie house this midday to borrow the hammer, Bertie explode like a balloon when he spot me. I recoil like cobra snake, anchor between Bertie front door, eye darting like iguana. I know for a fact since Bertie wife in New York, Bertie is not the same man anymore. Madness does fly-in he head at uneven times. Quick time he could cuff you bluff bluff like when donkey bucking in the street.

But me is he close friend. Still me on the alert, watching beady-eye at Bertie. "I want to borrow you hammer, man Bertie," I say, voice turn soft and friendly as if it coat with honey.

"If wasn't fo me daughter, I woulda choke me wife neck until she tongue come out like salimpenter. Choke she til she bawl fo murder. That ungrateful bitch. Think you could trust a woman? Is true thing old people say: 'Once a woman get hold she is a whore.' You hardly find a trustworthy woman today..." Bertie voice roar like when a tiger growling. He teeth gnashing like when you rubbing rockstone on concrete, and white-white foam dripping down he mouth blop blop just like when cow, hungry, seeing grass.

"But is not you who, help you wife to get American visa?" Me ask Bertie, inching slow-slow in the house. Then me sit in one chair, still on the alert.

"Is true! But that wasn't the bargain." Bertie voice turn smooth like trench water. He sit in another chair facing me, stroking he hair as if he thinking. Confused. "The bargain was, she would catch a work fo one-two-three month, buy things and come back home. Then give me a picture of New York. Then the two of we would sit down and decide what to do..." Bertie says, shaking he head. "Is what New York really doing to them women this?"

Me shrug me shoulder and recall Abdool sametime. Is three years now since Abdool wife in New York. Abdool still in Guyana facing hell and high-water, waiting on he wife to come back-home, and file-in he papers at the U.S. Embassy in Georgetown. But like Abdool patient running out. He like fish out water. And not one encouraging letter from he wife coming.

And the worst part of it is the rumour. Some people who coming back home say Abdool wife get a man. And that she would never come back-home to sponsor Abdool, and the one son. If you been in Abdool place, and some hoitty toitty people, back on holiday from New York tell you that, how you would feel? Is like when a bullet hit you blam behind you head, or one man kick you down one hilltop.

And imagine is you who consent for you wife to go New York because they say women quick to get jobs over there—live-in domestic, baby-sitter, cook. And if them women like conditions in New York they would hold-on until they pick up a sponsorship. Yes! is every damn human want get out this country as if a fever grip them.

Now, you who waiting patiently back-home like doorpost patient self: you

who nurturing hopes like a loving plant growing slow-slow in you flower garden, that one God blessed day you would be in New York, land of milk and honey, and this disappointment should happen. Yes! them blasted woman never recall you, just like Abdool and he son! Eh! Is how you would feel? Is like razor tearing you skin just like knife cutting leather.

So whenever you see Abdool drunk and cussing-up women, calling them ungrateful bitch, don't wonder why. And the slap in the back is that Abdool wife hardly writing to Abdool. As though Abdool dead. Things like that could make a man kill. All you hopes shatter like bruk-bottle. Is good thing Abdool mother get strong control over Abdool. Is she does caution Abdool.

"Think you wife going to forget she son?" Abdool mother does say, voice heavy like rain-cloud. "She must come back home to sponsor you and the boy. Think forever she going be in Merica?"

True! if it wasn't for Abdool mother, Abdool woulda done crack-up like dry bamboo in hot sun. Seeing Bertie condition now, me can't help plar ing he in Abdool shoe.

"But Bertie, you went to New York and see conditions there," me talk, trying to pep-up Bertie. Me still does wonder why Bertie never opted to stay in New York. Me, meself hear about the thousands of Guyanese who went to New York on Holiday visa, and left in the bloody country. Bertie could well do the same. Me fix-up me courage and ask Bertie the very question which beating me all the time.

"Bert, why you couldn't stay in New York?"

Ha ha! Bertie guffaw like one pig. "Believe is everybody could live that kind of life? Coming a stranger to you own self? And nobody giving you a dime. Is like a steel-jungle. And money is king..."

"But once you getting the money everything okay," me talk, certain now that is money, the magical U.S. dollar, which does pull most people over there. New York, here I come!

"Not so easy as you think," Bertie shake he head, then ruffle he hair with he hand. "Think job bearing on treetop in New York? You know how much people doing any blasted thing to hustle a buck? Millions! And the Authorities want the American experience. The American paper. Is a shame back-home to tell people that in Guyana you was an accountant or big civil servant. In New York you is a baggage boy, waiter..."

Oh me see! me tell meself. Me now know why people does say when they in New York they have to go back to school. And is people who use to be nurses, teachers, civil servants, lawyers, etc. in Guyana. Is funny thing though when you have to spend all them years over here studying big big books to turn one teacher, and when you in New York, you profession count as grass, as if you is a doormat. You have to start all over again as people does say, like a child going back to school. Me now see Bertie point.

"And thousands of legal people and illegal people living worst than me and you. Never mind food and clothes cheap. They have to work they ass day and night to make ends meet. Hardly getting time for theyself. Beside they

lonely. Not like here. As I say, people don't have time for you over there. Is like a rat race. Every manjack for theyself."

Bertie get out the chair, enter the verandah, and spit hackuu, pouting he lip as if he scorn. Eye blazing in fury. Then he come back in the house and pace up and down as if he lost.

"Know how much Guyanese family life break-up in New York? Thousands. The Wife going first. After couple years stay in New York, she fuget the husband back home. If the husband go first in New York same thing happening," Bertie add. He turn sarcastic now. "But is why the Guyanese Gov'ment don't ban people from going to New York and Toronto?"

"But people going for betterment. Cheap food. Cheap clothes. Eh-eh! what more you want?" Me voice ring with enthusiasm like one anxious child going to a circus. And is every damn thing you getting in New York.. from one pin to one tractor. Not like Guyana.

"You right in one way, but..." Bertie cut-in, he eye get a faraway look. He click he tongue. "Know how much West Indian immigrant living in New York loose they true sense of purpose? Thousands. They losing they identity. They get drowned by the American way of life. They hollow inside they body. No morals anymore. Money dominate they entire lifestyle."

"But still people want live there," me talk. And is true. Just pass across by the American Embassy in Georgetown one midday. Is hundreds of people lining outside, waiting to apply for holiday visa, thick-thick document in they hand, bankbook heavy with dollars. Them who get visa does thank God. They does do jhandee and katha. Feed the poor. Lay table to thank spirits. Carry offerings to the seawall. And them who get turn-down does feel like tearing up they clothes. Cuss up. Think somebody blight them. Cross they path. Going to the pundit and obeah man to check it out.

Want know why the ass they ain't get thru with American visa when they, too, walk with thick-thick document and heavy bankbook. Don't matter half the document is false, and bankbook might be a borrow one. Think is joke! People doing any blasted thing in this country to get an American holiday visa. Is like a frustrated desperation. As if you running away from a volcano.

Me know for a fact that plenty people get rob in this country. They give money to some con-men who claim they get contacts right in the American Embassy. A week later them con-men vanish with them people passport and money. Is thousands get fleece in this way. And you know how much girls and women get screw? Is them same con-men who does say: "Money alone is not enough to get this visa you know. At least you are a woman, and you understand..."

And them women and girls who look at the visa as pathway to salvation take the bait long time. And blams! them con-men enjoying they body in hotel rooms in Georgetown. Them girls and women believe all to god they getting the visa next week. They already see they self in New York. Imagine what people would say in they village soon as them people hear Sukranie or Bibi get one Visa.

"Eh-eh! look me story! But Sukranie na get Transport, Car, Bankbook, and

business. Is how she get American visa?" Sukranie neighbour going to say, eyes wide, mouth open. The neighbourhood feel like killing Sukranie. God! this Sukranie going to America!

And is what Bibi get? "If me ain't lie, she must be use she cat," another neighbour going to say, wishing Bibi drop dead tomorrow morning.

A week later, them con-men disappear with Sukranie and Bibi passport, money, and the memory of laying both women in bed. And is hundreds of girls and women get lay in this way by smart, cunning con-men who tongue sweet more than sugar, the New York twang rolling off they lip as if they been born in America, flashing U.S. dollars as if you pick it up in the street.

As me say before, people doing anything to get American visa. Why this Bertie giving a cock-eye picture about life in New York. Why? "Is why people want to go to New York?" Me ask Bertie.

"Because people believe they going to make quick money," Bertie talk. "But when you land over there is a different thing. Is a rat race. Relatives might only keep you for a month. After that you on you own. Is then reality dawn on you. Is anything come to you, you grabbing cause you want survive. You come lonely. You know how much people give up they good-good job? Sell out they house and land here? When reality knock them in New York, they crying blood. They shame to come back home. American culture too confuse for them. Don't matter how much they try, you could never be American. Is a kind of feeling that you are in-between. You never fit in. And you never secure. You could never walk the street and say you belong here..."

"When the emptiness knock you blam, you hustling to drink Guyanese rum, play Hindi film songs, calypso, eating you back-home food. Is then you does feel you are a Guyanese. Proud. You identity back with you. That you stay in New York is just temporary. That sometime in the future you going back-home to settle. Boy! don't matter which country you run to, think you could escape you grassroot? You own self? How long you could live in a borrow land?"

"But people like Abdool wife, you wife, and some chaps wife prefer New York than Guyana," Me say, eyes twinkling. "And the same thing happening with some women husband me know about".

"Tru story but..." Bertie silence me with he hand, smacking he tongue as if he pity me. "Boy!" Bertie continue, "clothes and perfumes damn cheap in New York. In Guyana it so blasted expensive, you could only look, but you can't buy. And that is the first thing catching them women eye in New York. And by nature you know women like look nice. They ain't care how hard they have to work, once they getting the fancy clothes, perfume and good food they think they solid like rockstone. But later when they realise how they was trick by the system, is too late.

"They shame to come back home. They ain't get nothing to show. They life come empty like barrel. They running from man to man, shame to face they own husband, waiting patiently back home... Same thing with some men who left they wife. In New York when they see white women leg, ha, boy! them women

skin up in all position, taking sunbath in the parks. Them men feel they in heaven. Feel they young again. Is now they start to live life. Know how much men going crazy to touch white women leg? To lay them down? Know how much Guyanese peep-man in New York? And you know how much different tablets selling there to give you cock-stand? And women is two for three cent in New York once you know the contact. Some Guyanese chaps going mad for white and Spanish women. They losing they grip. I tell you...

"At last when them same Guyanese men realise it was a false dream, is too late. They done batter-up theyself. They looking old, picking up any old hag to comfort they loneliness... They shame to come back home and face they wife and children. And not everything you see in New York take for granted. You might get toss by the waves..."

"You might get toss by the waves!" Bertie statement set me pondering why Guyanese people still eager to go to New York.

And in droves too! Is only the other day Sohan was telling me how he sister-in-law getting frustrated, sick, as though she want cuss-up everybody.

"Like the woman can't balance she self after the Embassy turn down she application for a visitor visa, and is two time," Sohan been talk. "And the woman get a good job in the bank here..."

Me, me self would like to go to New York if me get a chance. See conditions for meself. It gat to be something that pulling people to New York.

"And the joke is, the woman going to the sea every Sunday morning," Sohan cut-in. "She taking flowers, camphor, fruits and offer it to the seawater, begging the spirit in the water, fo help she get the visa the next time she apply. Then she bathing in the water to purify she self. And is six Sunday morning now she doing it..."

"What? an educated woman like that," Me say. "Going to the sea."

"She say the pundit tell she, she is a blight. That some evil spirit cross she path. And that any try she make to get betterment in life going to fall down," Sohan add.

"After nine Sunday, the pundit going to give she one tabij to wear. Pundit say when she going to the Embassy this time she bound to get thru with the holiday visa. That the tabij going to command the man who interviewing she, against he own will so she could get the visa..."

Sohan words knock me down flat. Was like when Campbell fly-out me leg stump blam down by the first slip. Was a real googly Campbell been bowl. Same thing with Sohan. He words is perfect fact. Think is fun! You know how much work the pundit, the majee and the obeah man getting these days from Guyanese people who want American and Canadian visa? Plenty. With how things going in the country is not surprise to hear one pundit turn millionaire. Boy! sometime me does want to know if manna sharing in New York and Canada. That you could turn rich overnight like them Rockefellers, Getty and Morgan.

True! me know a whole family from the next village who had to take spiritual bath from one pundit. Afterward the pundit give each member of the family

one tabij. Then the pundit instruct them what brand perfume to use on they clothes, the morning they going-in the American Embassy. And blam! is daddy, mummy, and children get holiday visa. Is like magic. As soon as the news spread the pundit couldn't able take off the crowd. Is like the pundit turn magic man overnight.

You might believe is a big joke. You should hear them chaps tell you about the perfumes which knocking they nose bladam just like when Kanhai hit the ball for four. Yes! just walk-past near them people who lining outside the American Embassy in Georgetown mid-week mornings, waiting to get-in the building. They want this visa. Some women does dress-up ninety-nine, the perfume so high you would think is a cosmetic shop. But when you get to know the truth, is the pundit and the obeah man does tell them women which brand perfume to use.

Beside, them same women does get tabij pin-on, on they brassiere. Them smart women does get goodluck-charm in they handbag where it could touch them document and bank-book. The more cunning women who smile could melt you like butter, does get a special ring made. Inside the ring does get "things" which them obeah men claim could command anyone to do your bidding, "once the ring in you middle finger."

So Sohan sister-in-law is not an exception. Is thousands of Guyanese people securing talis-man from the pundit, the majee and the obeah man first, then they would approach the American and Canadian Embassy with the hope of getting a visa. Tru-tru!

Is like people losing faith in themself. "Don t matter how much puja and katha me daughter and son-in-law do, the American Embassy still turning down they application," Ramroop been telling me one afternoon. "Like God Shree Bhagwan forsake them".

The same time me recall me old man words: "Boy! nowadays people doing jhandee and katha fo show-off sake. They mind is not in the work. Not like long time. Who ever hear bout pundit and majee fighting politics? Claim they leading the Indian people? You don't talk politics in mandir. Think Shree Bhagwan going to hear you prayers? No wonder the obeah men getting all the wuk. Is like people losing they bearing. The religion can't able hold them together. They believe going away going to calm they inside. Is not like long time. Is anybody doing jhandee and katha nowadays..."

But people like Bertie feel different. He believe New York trap he wife. Break-up he marriage life. Abdool believe to God New York betray he. Abdool talk plain that he can't attend masjid anymore. Could you imagine what agony them two chaps passing thru day by day?

And is damn true! Bertie and Abdool, each portray, represent the conflict raging in me own mind. As one old man in the street been say: "You don't know where you stand in dis country.

"If de sun shine tomorrow it make no diff'rence. Don't know if you going backwards, forwards. Only solution is to go away."

CHANT TO EARTH MOTHER—I

(Continued from Page 48)

I ride weightlessly upon enchanted bird.
Come guardian helpers lead me through,
Come hawk and eagle, snake and lizard,
Jaguar, alligator, shield me round.
Up steep mountains, through deep lakes,
Down long rivers winding dangerously.
Through treacherous swamps and fetid forests
The demon ones are kept at bay
Until at last deep in the underworld
I face Earth Mother with my plea.
Majestic, threatening, there she stands
Her animals enfolded in her outstretched hands.



PORTUGUESE DRAMA IN NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITISH GUIANA

by Sr. M. Noel Menezes, RSM

As a number of writers on Portuguese life testify the Portuguese had a great capacity for enjoyment. Evidence of this fact was already noted in their love of music and dance. No less in evidence was their flair for drama, both tragedy and comedy—a flair which was by no means novel or made a sudden appearance in British Guiana but was part and parcel of their home experience. In Funchal, amateur groups long delighted the Madeirenses. In the 1850s one group styled “Thalia” after the inventor of comedy gained much support and praise for its performances. At the same time in Portugal, her king, Luis, not noted for political acumen, was especially committed to the arts; above all, he was instrumental in making Shakespeare available in translation to his people.¹ Interest in drama was very much alive in Portugal and this interest was reflected in and shared by the Madeirenses.

In Madeira by mid-nineteenth century the Teatro Esperanca, inaugurated in 1859, was built with the support of the Chamber of Funchal. It not only produced its own plays but also hosted the Lisbon Drama Company and the Italian Drama Company which performed several Portuguese as well as Italian plays. The greatest hit of the Teatro Esperanca was the staging of the Mystery Play of three Acts and Four Scenes, *Gabriel e Lusbel*, popularly called *Santo Antonio*, which attracted crowds from all over the island.² In the late 1880s with public funds again voted by the Chamber of Funchal, the Teatro Dona Maria Pia was built.³ The following decade witnessed a spate of plays, dramatic as well as musical comedies, staged at this theatre. These plays were performed by artistes of the Portuguese Dramatic Company and Spanish Operatic Companies.⁴ From reports in the Madeira press these productions were of a very high standard.

In the late 1850s interest in the life of the Madeiran emigrants to British Guiana and the *retornados* was heightened by the production of the play, *A Familia do Demerarista*. A Drama de Um Acto by the well-known dramatist and writer, A. d’Azevedo. This play immortalised the Demerarista, the one returning from Demerara with wealth which he generously used to support and bring respect to his poverty-stricken family. The play, while depicting the sufferings of the poor of Madeira, showed the dignity and integrity of women who though deprived were not depraved. The play was much acclaimed in Funchal but it is not known whether it was ever produced in British Guiana during the later part of the nineteenth century.⁵

It was not too long after the Madeiran emigrants had begun to put down their roots in British Guiana that their inherent love for drama surfaced and found expression on the stage. From the records it seemed that formal Portuguese drama made its appearance in Demerara when a group of Portuguese Amateurs presented a dramatic performance in aid of the Girls’ Orphanage in

April 1854.⁶ Here again was a legacy from Madeira where a number of performances, both dramatic and musical, was staged for charity. Cultural presentations before a large audience of the Portuguese community in British Guiana were often produced in aid of the Church, the Catholic Church, to which the Portuguese were loyal adherents. To help raise funds for the building of Meadowbank Church "a very lively and Drammatic (sic) and Musical Entertainment by Portuguese Amateurs" comprising popular musical selections and one-act comedies was given in the Philharmonic Hall at the end of November 1875.⁷ In the 1880s when the need for a new organ for Sacred Heart R.C. Church, Main Street, was discussed, the Portuguese Amateur group again rose to the occasion and produced a Comedy in two Acts: *Intrigas no Bairro*.⁸

In the last decades of the nineteenth century the Portuguese Amateur Dramatic Club was in the forefront of dramatic presentations in the colony. The newspapers of the day, both English and Portuguese, were replete with lengthy, detailed descriptions of dramatic recitals and plays performed by Portuguese artistes whose names became household words. The fact that these dramatic recitals and plays were executed in Portuguese underscored the fact of the continuing knowledge of the Portuguese language among the Portuguese community in British Guiana well into the twentieth century. It was obvious that the Portuguese still wished to hold on to this medium of communication and the hallmark of their culture. Yet one must not conclude that the audiences at the Portuguese plays consisted only of the Portuguese-speaking community. Drama, especially comedy, transcended language, and there were non-Portuguese who graced the performances, enjoying the action even though not understanding the language.

On 17 April 1888 the Portuguese Amateur Dramatic Club presented three comedies in the Philharmonic Hall: *Travessuras de Cupido*, *Uma Aposta* and *Os Estroinas*.⁹ A well-filled house enjoyed the comedies to such an extent that they requested another entertainment of a similar kind. Thus in June the Dramatic Club again made its appearance on stage performing the comedy, *Os Filhos de Adao* to a large audience.¹⁰ At the same time the Georgetown Amateur Dramatic Club presented *Richard III*, Sc. IV, Act 4 which the press noted was poorly appreciated. It seemed that the Guianese audience preferred comic songs and farce to tragedy.¹¹ The Portuguese Dramatic Club, most probably sensing the mood of the society, produced a series of comedies. It might well have divined the heart of comedy which "is never the gaiety of things; ... it is the groan made gay."¹² Comedy indeed stresses the common bond, seeing man as a social animal, "gently mocking him for his ultimate unimportance."¹³ Thus, comedy spoke to the Madeireneses who, far away from their island home, needed the cohesion of the common bond who, in those early years of settling in an alien land were made to feel so strongly their unimportance. Possibly the theatre was one of the means by which the Madeirans came to terms with life. Their penchant for farcical comedy "with its absurd situations and exaggeration of character"¹⁴ softened the harsh realities of life.

For centuries dramatists have been conscious of "the almost magical

quality of songs within drama"¹⁵ and the Portuguese dramatic presentations expressed this consciousness with their incorporation of choruses and dances. There was no dearth of dramatic nor musical talent among the Portuguese. This talent was nurtured among the children who gave as many fine performances as did the adults. The schools were, as they continued to be in later years, training grounds for potential artistes both in drama and in music. The children of the Portuguese Catholic School, Main Street, produced a spectacular drama entitled: *Um Naufragis nas Costas da Bretanha*. The *Daily Chronicle* enthusiastically observed:

The principal characters enacted by lads and lasses with remarkable mimetic power and some spoke their lines with intuitive elocutionary talent. One little fellow was an especial favourite as an amiable bravado being wonderfully well "made up" with a tawny beard and adopting a swaggering gait with perfect ease.¹⁶

The performance, staged at the Philharmonic Hall, was hailed as "a great success" and another successful performance was repeated a month later.¹⁷

A THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE

WIL BE GIVEN IN THE
PHILHARMONIC HALL,
ON *THURSDAY EVENING, 12th*
APRIL, 1888,

By the Members of the Portuguese Dramatic and Recreative Club. Several Comedies will be performed. For particulars, see programme.

PRICE OF ADMISSION :

RESERVED SEATS.....72 Cents.

BACK SEATS.....36 "

Tickets will be sold at the Hall. Performance to commence at 8 o'clock precisely.

10th April, 1888.

The last decade of the nineteenth century was marked by a number of Portuguese dramatic and musical performances, most of them comedies at which the Portuguese Amateurs excelled. It seemed they were bent on ending the century with laughter and not with tears. In May 1894, although the Portuguese Amateurs presented a stirring drama, *Scenes do Brazil*, at the Assembly Rooms, it was followed by two short pieces, one a comedy and the other a comedietta, *Choro on Rio*, and *Os dios Estrionas*. The comedy, *Choro on Rio*, was acclaimed the *piece de resistance* of the evening's entertainment because of the excellent presentation and the high standard of the acting, especially of the artistes, Messrs. Fernandes and Dias and Miss Jardim. The press hoped that the Portuguese Amateurs would continue to promote "such highly enjoyable entertainments of-
tender."¹⁸ A month later the group com-
plied with a *Recita Dramatica*, also held

at the Assembly Rooms—a presentation comprising of three one-act comedies and a comic scene. The names of Messrs. Luiz Martins, F.C. Fernandes, J. Silvano, C. De Freitas and the Misses dos Santos and Jardim, the well-known and leading artistes among the Portuguese Amateurs, received the plaudits of the audience and the press for their spirited performances.¹⁹

A noteworthy feature was the ability of the actors and actresses to give convincing and humorous renditions which illustrate the lighter side of the Portuguese character. While some writers considered them sober with a tendency to melancholy,²⁰ others have commented on the propensity of the Portuguese for laughter and jokes," a humour that can be pricked to irony and truth."²¹

On auspicious occasions in the life of the Portuguese community gala performances were produced. On the anniversary of the Restoration of Portugal, 1 December 1640, the Portuguese marked the occasion with a Comedy-Drama: 29 or Honour and Glory in three Acts and four Scenes with a cast of more than fifty persons. The Portuguese newspaper, *Chronica Seminal*, advertised it as "a remarkable production, the best that has yet been produced in Demerara."²² But nothing was to equal the glorious commemoration of the Fourth Centenary of the discovery of the Cape route to India by the famous Portuguese navigator, Vasco da Gama. A rash of Church celebrations, rounds of concerts and plays and parades made 1898 a memorable year for the Portuguese. The decorations of the Portuguese business premises and residences were so elaborate and lavish that

1 DE DEZEMBRO DE 1640!

PARA comemorar o jubileu da restauração de Portugal e do descobrimento da Índia por Vasco da Gama, os Portuguezes de Demerara, em 1.º de Dezembro, produziram a seguinte Comedia-Drama em 3 Actos e 4 Quadros, com mais de 50 pessoas, e com a produção de Luiz Camacho.

29

OU

HONRA E GLORIA !!!

COMEDIA-DRAMA

DE COSTUMES MILITARES

EM 3 ACTOS E QUATRO QUADROS

Tomam parte neste esplendido drama, mais de 50 pessoas!

COM A PRODUÇÃO DE LUÍZ CAMACHO.

1898. The Great Portugal 1640-1940

A obra de espectáculo mais brilhantemente ornada, tanto a parte da execução como da tendência.

A parte da execução distinguida com um casto e com bastante parte de actores e actrices, e com a produção de Luiz Camacho.

29

HONRA E GLORIA !!!

FUTURILS 2198 FIDELIS BROS. & CO. LONDON

1 de Novembro de 1897

it was correctly noted that "the festivities were carried out with all the pomp and brilliancy which characterise Lusitanian functions."²³

Into the twentieth century the plays went on. In 1901 a "fine and beautiful play", obviously an operetta, *O Conde de Monte Cristo*, as it was accompanied by a large orchestra, was produced by the Portuguese Amateurs, again evincing great praise.²⁴ The following year, the ladies were again in the forefront when they performed an opera, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and a "cleverly produced play," *Gunpowder Tea*, in aid of the *Plaisance Mission*.²⁵

As Styan wrote: "Playgoing is an art. It demands an active enthusiasm to join in an act of creation, the skill to interpret stage action and the discipline of an artist to fashion the play in the mind."²⁶ The Portuguese certainly enjoyed this art form to the hilt and brought to it all the elements of the art—the vocal and aesthetic skills, costume designing and making, the building of sets, a confidence in themselves and a sensitivity to their audience. In their love of comedy they walked in the long and great tradition of Grecian and Shakespearian theatre with its mixture of tragedy and comedy, as well as that of the *commedia dell'arte* of sixteenth and seventeenth century Italy and France. Were they aware that "within comedy there is always despair, a despair of ever finding a right ending except by artifice and magic?"

NOTES

¹Charles E. Nowell, *A History of Portugal* (New Jersey: D. van Nostrand, Co., Inc., 1952), p. 200.

²Alberto Artur, "Teatros Antigos na Madeira", *Das Artes e da Historia de Madeira*, No. 37, VII, 83.

³This theatre still continues to function staging plays as well as ballet from prestigious companies, among them the Calouste Gulbenkian Company, Lisbon.

⁴Artur, pp. 87-88.

⁵As noted in my previous article on "Music in Portuguese Life in British Guiana" this play was translated and produced by staff and students at the University of Guyana on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Portuguese.

⁶C.O. 116/16. *The Colonist*, 5 April 1854.

⁷*The Watchman*, Friday 26 November 1875. National Archives, Guyana.

⁸C.O. 116/16. *The Colonist*, 17 July 1883.

⁹*The Daily Chronicle*, 11 April 1888.

¹⁰The Daily Chronicle, 6 June 1888.

¹¹The Daily Chronicle, 7 June 1888.

¹²Walter Kerr, *Tragedy and Comedy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968), p. 19.

¹³J.L. Styan, *The Dramatic Experience* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 94.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁵David A. Male, *Approaches to Drama* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1975), p. 82.

¹⁶The Daily Chronicle, 12 September 1886.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸The Daily Chronicle, 4 May 1894.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 7 June 1894.

²⁰William A. Combe. *A History of Madeira. With a Series of Twenty-Seven Coloured Engravings, illustrative of the Costumes, Manners and Occupations of the Inhabitants of That Island* (London: Published by R. Ackerman, 1821), p. 36.

²¹Sarah Bradford, *Portugal* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 21 and Elizabeth Nicholas, *Madeira and the Canaries* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), p. 15.

²²*Chronica Seminal*, 15 November 1897. N.A.G.

²³The Daily Chronicle, 16 July 1898.

²⁴The Argosy, 6 November 1901.

²⁵The Daily Chronicle, 14 June 1902.

²⁶J.L. Styan, *The Elements of Drama* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 285.

ESTHER CHAPMAN¹ AND THE EXPATRIATE WEST INDIAN NOVEL

by Frank Birbalsingh

Esther Chapman's novel *Too Much Summer* tells the story of an English woman who goes to Jamaica, with her children, in order to avoid the hostilities of World War Two in England. The novel records the diversions of this woman, Lloyd Bremerton, and of others like herself in a tropical paradise, far removed from the cares and anxieties of the real world of conflict, war, and the struggle to survive. As material for escapist fantasy, much of the novel's action is indeed concerned with the artificial social privileges, and apparently unlimited sexual indulgence of white expatriates who feel unconfined by the moral and social restrictions they believe they have left behind in their native land. Such uninhibited conduct involves issues of Conradian significance; for characters may gradually lose control of themselves, like Kurtz, and be led to confront aspects of their personality which normally lie hidden deep in their inner selves. The degree to which characters in *Too Much Summer* explore their inner selves largely determines the value of the novel as a serious reflection on Jamaica, the Caribbean, and life in general.

As a reflection on mid-century Jamaica, *Too Much Summer* provides typical Eurocentric insights. This is Lloyd Bremerton's reaction to Jamaica soon after her arrival on the island:

Here [in Jamaica] there is no hardship, there is no war, there is no winter, there are no men and women huddling together to give themselves and each other courage and warmth. There is no bravery, there is no gallantry, there is no funk and no fear. Everybody is selfishly engaged in enjoying life, every inconvenience caused by the war is a personal grievance. The sun shines nearly every day, and when it rains it is an insult, they all grumble, nobody goes out or adapts himself to the circumstance. Even the workers, many of them, do not go to work. They have come to expect the sun and the luxury and the comfort, and now they grudge every moment which is clouded and resent every stone in the path. They are as sensitive to discomfort as the princess with a pea in her bed. (98-99)

Lloyd intends her comments to apply both to tourists and visitors like herself, as well as to those she calls "workers", the islanders themselves. This "dolce far niente" type of life makes Jamaica largely a convenient locale for the diversions of metropolitan holiday-makers. This is an observation about colonies or former colonies that is common in novels by British or European writers who adopt a point of view that is solidly Eurocentric, looking at the colony with

eyes that see from outside, and therefore do not detect features of their subject that can only be viewed from the inside.

One should hasten to add that such a point of view is not necessarily a handicap in novels dealing with non-metropolitan countries. Since all points of view are partial, or selective, and therefore limited, each novelist must take steps to reduce the limitations in his point of view. While novelists like E.M. Forster, Joyce Cary and Joseph Conrad may show Indians or Africans as less confined by inhibitions than Europeans, they do not depict their African or Indian characters as totally oblivious to social responsibilities, obligations and conventions. Where, as in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad does perceive social breakdown and chaos, it is not presented as nonchalance or "dolce far niente", but rather as elemental animal savagery. Cary also in *Mister Johnson*, in somewhat Rousseauesque terms, takes Nigerian customs as representing a culture more generous and accepting than his own. Similarly, Forster's *Passage to India*, represents Indians as emotionally unrestrained, less hidebound by the more empirical, rationalistic attitudes of his English compatriots. In *Too Much Summer*, however, pleasure-loving (white) Europeans mix freely with equally pleasure-loving and indulgent (black) Jamaicans. The routine for Lloyd and her friends is to sunbathe all morning while reading or drinking, rest in bed in the afternoon, then emerge in the evening for more eating, drinking and talking.

That this tourist's life style does not correspond with the experience of most Jamaicans does not totally escape Mrs. Chapman's narrator. She acknowledges as much in observing the poverty and overcrowded living conditions faced by the majority of people in Jamaica:

Jamaica was poor. People said that it was over-populated, that ruinous agricultural methods were despoiling it, that heroic remedies were needed to cure its troubles. But it was not the sad, defeated country it was made to appear by those who indignantly trumpeted its problems abroad. Far from it; its people were happy and cheerful, for their needs were few and easily satisfied. A little work, a little rum, a little love... that was the recipe for the good life. But things were changing. The politicians were bringing disorder and dissatisfaction to a people once law-abiding and content. (167)

This is a quick, general summary of living conditions in Jamaica. It is mentioned "en passant," and is clearly not something the narrator wants to dwell on. She merely sets the record straight, and this cursory matter of factness suggests little sympathy for Jamaican hardships that must have been as deep seated as they were widespread.

Far from showing sympathy, Lloyd's account underplays the severity of Jamaican problems, suggesting that they are largely the invention of newly-arrived politicians who are bent on disrupting the peace and stability of structures and habits acquired during British colonial rule in Jamaica. However

liberal or democratic in outlook the narrator might claim to be, her attitude conceals views about Jamaica which are, at best, paternalistic. It is scarcely liberal or democratic to claim that the super-imposed stability of British colonial rule, maintained largely by military might, is preferable to the turbulence of pre-independence, political ferment in Jamaica. Lloyd does admit that her views may be superficial. But she insists that “the working people [in Jamaica] would have to learn their duties as well as their rights, their obligations as well as their privileges.” Such clichés thinly veil the proposition, once firmly held by liberal paternalists, that colonised peoples needed to be properly schooled in the art of political responsibility before they could be considered ready to emerge from the “protection” of colonial rule and all its necessary restrictions. This is a solidly Eurocentric point of view, made even more unyielding by its total neglect or rejection of indigenous Jamaican interests and local concerns.

To some extent, this point of view is imposed on Lloyd by social contacts among other expatriates like herself, or professional, upper class Jamaicans, who may be of mixed blood, but are more white than black in life-style. The main conflict in the novel emerges from Lloyd’s liaison with such a Jamaican—Van—who is “coloured”, rather than black. The seemingly trivial distinction in skin colour is important because of the social and economic implications of race and colour in mid-century Jamaica. Van is an affluent lawyer whose social and economic status is partly determined by the fact that he is “coloured” rather than black. Lloyd acknowledges this point when she tells Van: “But you’re not black, Van. You’re practically white.” (96) Later, when Van argues that his coloured skin makes it impossible for him to marry Lloyd, she replies:

“But Van, my darling Van, you are not a Negro, you are not a black man of repugnant physical type ...”

“But I have Negro blood in my veins, and to some degree, to some extent the repugnance exists.” (132)

Both Van and Lloyd agree on the repugnance of Negro or black features. Hence, Van’s point: that an admixture of black blood in him, however, slight, makes him “repugnant”, and marriage to Lloyd impossible:

We can’t help it, Lloyd. The white race has been dominant too long. I shall always believe that your white skin gives you a sense of superiority, and I shall always believe that my brown skin makes me inferior to you. And that will not do. That does not do in a permanent relationship. A white woman and a coloured man can sleep together. And then they had better forget it. (131)

Lloyd disagrees, offering a spirited argument in favour of mixed marriages, and claiming that enlightened individuals can transcend deeply divisive attitudes historically attached to questions of race and colour.

If the author's intention in *Too Much Summer* is to illustrate the validity of her heroine's contention in favour of inter-racial marriage, this intention is frankly contradicted by the action of her novel. Despite Lloyd's passionate advocacy of non-racist ethics, the action in *Too Much Summer* proves that these ethics cannot easily be transcended. As a rival "advocate" of racist ethics, Van rejects Lloyd's description of his "nigger look" as "a slight physical oddity", (104) and claims instead that it is "a fundamental psychological disability." (104) Van is adamant on this point. He asserts with great confidence that hatred of his own race and colour has been imposed on him by history, and is irreversible. It is bad enough to feel such self-hatred. To speak about it with Van's confidence seems perverse, masochistic and wilfully self destructive.

Such attitudes encourage Van to regard Lloyd as a representative of the master race which has caused his troubles in the first place. It is therefore fitting to wreak vengeance on her, and he frequently taunts and assaults her physically. Van's anger and frustration are also vented in frequent racial abuse as when he mocks Lloyd: "You're developing strong tastes, darling. A real Jamaican! Rum... and Niggers." (97) Even for readers familiar with the writings of Fanon, Van's masochistic self-hatred seems theatrical, irrational, excessive. We instinctively side with Lloyd's liberal approach because it seems more rational, realistic and desirable. Yet, it is Lloyd's approach which is shown to be hypocritical and unrealistic, when she breaks down under pressure and shouts at Van "Leave me alone, you damn nigger. Leave me alone." (97) This is her dark inner self that is at last revealed. Her latent racism, until then unrecognized under layers of pious liberalism, learnt reasonableness and apparent tolerance, is finally exposed. Lloyd's liaison with Van ends abruptly after an incident in which her children show that they too consider Van, if not a "nigger", only slightly different from one.

On the surface, at any rate, *Too Much Summer* demonstrates Conrad's thesis in which recognition of inner corruption in oneself is promoted by the absence of external social restraints to which one is accustomed. At the end of the novel Lloyd reflects on her situation:

Of course she could not remain in the tropics forever. People said that it was demoralising, that if you had nothing to do it softened you up in time. That was ridiculous. It certainly had not demoralised her. It needed only an effort of will, one of these days, to pull herself together and go back to her own land and her own people. (190)

But the concluding scene shows Lloyd, in her role as a colonial memsahib, lording it over her black servant, by impulsively rejecting the elaborate tea she has prepared, and calling instead for a drink. This is the end of the Conradian process of decline for her. Her husband who came to Jamaica and took her children back to England with him, has started divorce proceedings. Having lost her family as well as Van, Lloyd resorts to a procession of anonymous lovers.

Her self-abandonment to promiscuity is Mrs. Chapman's version of degeneration into instinctive, uncerebral, animal behaviour such as Kurtz observes in the Africans around him, but fails to recognize in himself. As we see in Lloyd's last quoted reflections at the end of the novel, she also fails to recognize any demoralization or degeneration in herself.

Like *Heart of Darkness*, *Too Much Summer* has much potential for illuminating the personality of the protagonist, and the customs of metropolis and colony. Kurtz's decline into madness illuminates both the tenuous ambiguity of his own beliefs, and the hypocrisy of the social, moral and religious assumptions on which those beliefs are based. Admittedly, Kurtz's opinions are less reliable on the subject of the Congolese. Conrad confirms the unreliability of Kurtz's observations on the Congolese, by relaying these observations through Marlow who hears them from someone else. There is no similar narrative subtlety in *Too Much Summer*. Lloyd's innate, suppressed racism and self-delusion are not shown to affect the accuracy of her observations on Jamaica, beyond reflecting some hypocritical or patronizing judgments. Whereas Kurtz's decline occurs at a deeper, moral level affecting his very survival, Lloyd's decline takes place at a more superficial level involving cultural and political judgments which do justice to the narrator as well as the author.

Lloyd's observations on Jamaican society, for example, would do the author herself credit:

All young men, especially white young men, were spoiled in Jamaica. They had social opportunities far beyond the dreams of young men of their class and earning capacity in England. Where middle-class young men, in that country would be visiting cinemas, dance-halls and super-teashops in the company of post-office girls or typists, here they were dining out in dinner jackets and dancing in the smartest night clubs at the invitation (and expense) of the fashionable society mothers ... or wives! If they were especially personable, they would find themselves bidden to King's House, to serve as dancing partners for the Governor's wife. (118-119)

There is nothing excessive or damaging in this. It is a sober and perceptive commentary on social privileges enjoyed by English people in colonial Jamaica. It is not linked to Lloyd's innate racism in the same way that Kurtz's racist outlook is made responsible for his conclusions about Congolese society. Lloyd's observations are objective in identifying the privileges of a ruling class. Of English women in Jamaica, she says: "There were servants, good food, and, if one wanted it, an endless succession of lovers." (136) Where she fails is in recognizing that she herself succumbs to these "privileges." But this does not invalidate the accuracy of her comments. For Lloyd is aware of the inherent inequality of Jamaican, colonial society and acknowledges its corrupting effect on the white, ruling class, even if she is less perceptive about its effect on most

Jamaicans. Her comments on her children are particularly persuasive: They were indubitably spoiled: they had acquired the habit of indulgence by teachers, parents and servants; they had lost the self-reliance that had so touchingly accompanied childishness in their own land; they were dictatorial to servants and petulant when their wishes were disregarded: the egotistic princelings of a land of luxury. (128)

Lloyd's children are saved from total degeneration by their father who takes them back to England, while Lloyd is left in Jamaica with the increasingly illusory hope that she too would one day return to England and find salvation.

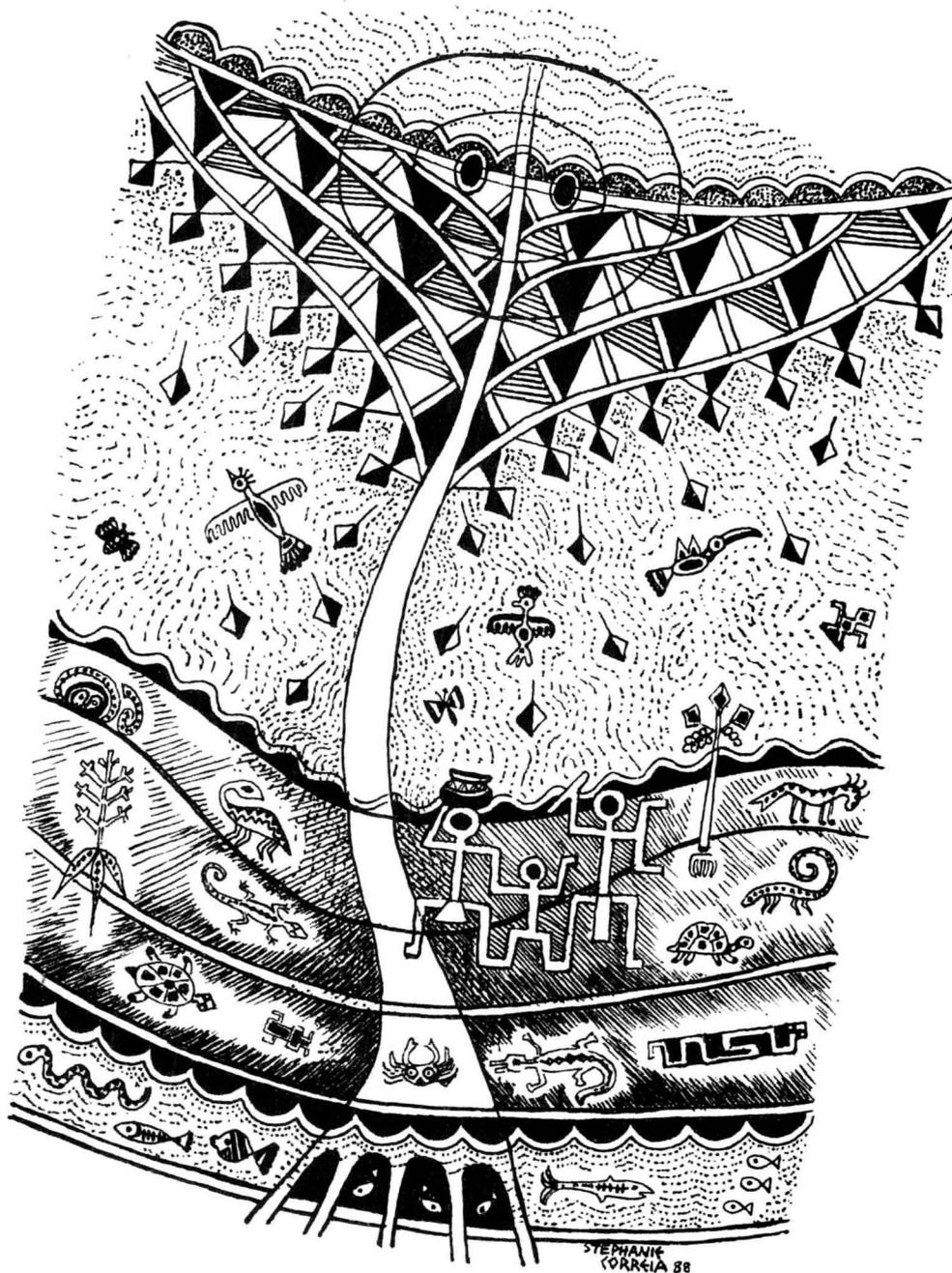
One of the main differences between **Heart of Darkness** and **Too Much Summer** is that there is no salvation available in Conrad's novel. For Conrad the human heart is as impenetrably dark as the Congolese forest. For Mrs. Chapman, however, England is a veritable repository of light and learning which is only temporarily disfigured by war. Her narrator regrets having to leave England in spite of the war; she only goes reluctantly to Jamaica, where she finds that her worst fears of foreign places are realized. It is the unyielding Eurocentricity of this point of view which limits the scope of **Too Much Summer**, turning it into a lively travelogue of sound documentary value rather than a fictional study of substantial depth.

Notes

1 Esther Chapman (nee Hyman) is the author of the novels **Punch and Judy** (1927); **Study in Bronze** (1928) (1952); **Pied Piper** and other non-fiction works. All quotations are from her fourth novel **Too Much Summer**, Chantry, (London, 1953).

ARAWAK CREATION

The Watcher in the Heights looked down
Upon the bare earth with a frown.
He caused the great Kumaka tree to grow until it touched the sky
And picking twigs and leaves He threw them down from high.
Those that fluttered turned to birds, even the little wren,
And others touching earth below became the animals and men.
Fish and other creatures swam in the waters wild
And sitting in the Heights above, the Watcher smiled.



INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN CARTER

by Rovin Deodat

RD How did you become a poet?

MC One does not become a poet, one finds oneself a poet. One finds oneself involved in a certain activity which is continued. The other question implied is to what was one exposed that precipitated this “finding” oneself a poet?

That is a question which I don't think anyone can really answer. At least I cannot answer in detail. It happens.

RD But, of course you were exposed to certain writers.

MC Yes, in school at Queen's I was exposed to the usual Elizabethan lyrics and the Romantic Poets — Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth. As you move from form to form you are exposed to different types of writing.

RD At any stage in your youth, however, did you deliberately set out to copy any particular poet?

MC No, you can't copy — what you do find yourself doing is echoing — you don't set out to do it.

What happens is that those echoes are not good enough. They don't reflect what you are attempting to do. But as is to be expected, in a young man's poems you do find echoes.

As he grows older or develops, those echoes are muted, but they are still at work, and that is why my attitude to the examination of poetry remains not one of biographical or psychological investigation. It is a question rather of understanding what is meant by poetic sense. Just the same way you have common-sense, even so there is poetic-sense. All the things we have talked of so far — of exposure and influences — are ingredients in the development of poetic sense.

This poetic sense is made up of books which you read and people you have spoken to, until you come to the point where the critics come into it. I think the critics operate by using four main approaches. You can approach Poetry as Art, Poetry as Thought, Poetry as Speech and Poetry as Inspiration.

I would like to suggest that it is at the level of inspiration that poetry understood as “sense” makes sense.

That is not to say it is not also art, thought or speech.

RD But is it work, is it hard work?

- MC** Precisely those things are at work and you are at work with them.
- RD** What happens to a young poet who is just starting out, he is not too sure what to ask of himself, should he seek to learn a craft called poetry which he can learn from others? Does he look within for some kind of inspiration? In short he asks himself is poetry intuitive or is it worked out?
- MC** Both simultaneously. At a given point one facet may appear more important than another, but in fact they are all working together. It depends on the type of poet he is. You may have a poet whose sensibility causes him to be attracted to a different type of verse. And here must be very careful to make a distinction between poetry and verse.
- RD** What is the distinction?
- MC** I'm glad you asked. It is one which confuses many students. A lot of confusion comes from an indiscriminate opposition between poetry and prose. In my opinion the differences between verse and prose is not the same as between poetry and prose. The real opposition is between what is poetical and what is unpoetical.
Let me put it this way, if you buy a box of medicine in a drug store, there is usually a piece of paper with directions as to how it can be used. Well those directions can be described as Literature. But then there is another kind of Literature — Literature as Art, hence, Literary Art. Now we can return to the proposition of Poetry as Art and eliminate Literature as an opposition since we have already shown that Literature subsumes Art. This is why I said earlier that we can approach Poetry as Art, Speech, Thought or Inspiration.
- RD** What we really need to understand is the difference between Verse and Prose. It is not the same as the difference between Poetry and Prose.
- MC** That is a very important question. If you are using Poetry as Art then you can have Poetry in Prose. But Poets use Verse not because it is something to be used but because it is necessary. In Physics, for example, a physicist who puts down a physical Theory is not putting down a mathematic scheme although without the mathematical schematisation that physical theory is not understandable or clear.
- RD** Martin, in the fifties you wrote some dynamic and wonderful poems. How involved were you in the poetry and politics of times, in the sense that one intruded into the other and one inspired the other?
- MC** One must not confuse Subject matter with Poetic Sense which I spoke of earlier. Poetic Sense is something that emerges from something that is

done. The subject matter is already there, *prima facie*. It is there before you start. What is involved here is the work that is done with yourself, and since by definition you are already involved in doing something, then what you are involved in doing is involved in the work. So to separate one's subjectivity from the material you are working with is to go up a blind alley.

You can only infer what was being done from the poem itself. In other words, you can't say beforehand that given the circumstances of this period you are going to have a poem like this one emerging.

RD Let me ask you another question on the subject. If the fifties were not as traumatic, politically and socially for Guyana, and you were not as involved as you were ...

MC It would not be the fifties. Let me put it this way. It is a principle, a very important principle. Many years ago somebody told me if Mahatma Gandhi was not non-violent, India would have had Independence long before 1947. But I responded, then he would not have been Mahatma Gandhi.

RD I see what you mean. In our preliminary discussions before this interview began, we talked about the biographical influence in a poem and whether it was possible to isolate, for example, inspiration here and politics there, like patches put together to form a whole.

MC All these aspects and emotions which accompany those aspects are realised in a poem. All you can do, is after having read the poem, you can now infer what went into the making of that poem. It is only from the poem, as a base, that you can move. The poem is where you start from, rather than the politics or accident of history in which the poem was written.

RD Well you have answered those who would tend to say that MC was at the right place at the right time hence he was able to write that kind of poem.

MC Notice you smuggled in "that kind" of poem, and that is the principle. All that has gone before is only available for discussion on the basis of the poem itself. So you are starting from the poem in any case. That is an important point, because I myself, may say I suspect this poem had something to do with X, Y or Z, when in fact that may be only apparent. It may not be so. Only by comparing the poem with another and looking at it in relation to the whole corpus of poems, that one can really detect what is going on.

RD The other thing which struck me about you and other poets writing in the

fifties, was the fact that one felt here was a new breed of poets using their sensibilities and talents to focus on our local situation and environment. We started seeing in those poems pictures of ourselves and our society not someone else or somewhere else.

- MC** Yes, because a poet is a particular creature in a particular place in a particular time. He cannot escape that. T.S. Eliot made the point many years ago when examining this subject. Students are usually concerned about something called universality in a poem. Eliot made the point, and it was a casual point, he wasn't arguing it, that in order to be universal you have to be local.
- RD** I want to conclude with this question particularly for our young poets who would like to become accomplished poets. What advice do you have for them?
- MC** First they must read poetry and in their reading discover what appeals to them and what they respond to. There is a tradition of belief, and this was certainly true in the Elizabethan Period, that a poet was a sort of singing bird, that he didn't think. Or what they called lyricism was some form of fluency, when in fact lyricism is hard work, in the sense that you have to have an insight into words and meanings. What I would suggest to a young poet is to work hard at it — study, concentrate, and understand that what he is involved in is something that has a very great and human tradition.

INTERVIEW WITH EDWARD KAMAU BRATHWAITE

by Stewart Brown

SB You were saying yesterday in your closing remarks to the (Caribbean Literature) conference that you felt the battle over the validity of nation-language as a vehicle for West Indian literature had more or less been won. How do you see the nation-language poetry movement developing in the future?

EKB Well, nation-language has always been here with us as you know. What is significant is that since the arrival of the dub poets and I suppose since *The History of the Voice*, I'm not sure, nation-language has been starting to be taken seriously by critics and by anthologists. Now the question is how will nation-language develop, how much further can it develop? My view is that until dub poetry itself begins to go in for longer poems, more complex poems, they will in fact, paradoxically, act as a brake on the development of nation-language because dub is too much bound in with rhythm, a very strong rhythm dictated by the base line of the reggae music and I would like to see the dub poets begin to extend themselves into a complexity of rhythms and various themes, as jazz does. Jazz does not get stuck to a single statement but has a series of statements. But nation-language also involves an exploration of our culture of course, and we are beginning to see people moving into Shouter Baptist areas, and so on. I think that's where the big development is going to come, when the artist, the writers could again follow the lead that nation-language gives them into the rituals of the people, then we shall really begin to get a very serious literature based on nation-language.

SB I was talking to Ras Michael Jeune, the Guyanese dub-poet, in Georgetown last week, and he was saying that his group are trying to make a *dub opera* based on Martin Carter's 'I Come from the Nigger Yard'.

EKB That is a direction I'm glad to hear about. I think until they take up the large challenges they don't really understand the full resources of the language.

SB What did you think of Carolyn Cooper's paper to the conference when, half way through her presentation she abandoned the formal 'international' English of academic discourse because she felt it was

inadequate to the material she was discussing (Sistren's Lion Heart Gal) and continued her paper in a version of nation-language?

EKB I missed that presentation but I did read the paper and my response to it was—I may be wrong—but I got the impression that she didn't really make the point that she wanted to make, which was that nation-language can enter into such a discourse. To me, when she used nation-language it was merely for narrative, she said things like "then dem say" and then she repeated what they said. But there was no analysis of content in nation-language at that spot. I may be wrong but I felt she didn't really do enough for what she wanted to do.

SB What struck me was that I wondered how many people in that audience, mostly West Indians, actually followed it?

EKB I gathered that very few people did, except the Jamaicans of course.

SB Even all the Jamaicans I wonder, because some of the questions that followed, from middle class, Jamaican, academics, seemed to suggest that they, certainly, had a lot of trouble with it.

EKB Well, I'm interested because normally all Jamaicans speak both languages, I never found Jamaicans had any problems, whatever their class, in understanding their nation-language but I don't know about that.

SB Would you see such a limitation of audience as a problem for a nation-language literature?

EKB It would be a problem for nation-language—yes—especially what I call the fundamental-nation which I think Caroline was using but I think you've got to go on with it, you've got to make the point that the language is there and is viable and is respectable. I think the real challenge for the artist who knows his English and mediates between the two languages is to develop an English which increasingly reflects the nature of nation-language. I think that is the challenge and that is really what's been happening since Selvon—and early Naipaul did it too—to capture English in terms of the tonal qualities and cultural parameters of nation-language.

SB Do you see Walcott doing that too, in pieces like 'Spoiler's Return'?

EKB Very much so. In his plays he's always done it, but Walcott is always

very sensitive to what is happening in the Caribbean and he has the capacity to do whatever is happening. So as long as dub and nation-language remain central I think Walcott would want to demonstrate that he is equally competent in that area, which is all to the good.

SB Can we go on a little bit to talk about *X/Self* and the way you use nation-language there, as the bearer, the agent of history really. In my review I think I said that *X/Self* offered a kind of synthesis of the books that had gone before and was a summation of a personal history up to that point. Do you see that making any kind of sense?

EKB To a degree, but there is more than a summation. In fact *X/Self* is the beginning of another series of things. It is a junction, and of course there are summation parts of it but there is also, for the first time, a significant Amerindian presence in *X/Self* and there is much more of what I would call magical realism than before. Technically its not really so much summation as another possible direction into which we have to define ourselves. It is also much more personal too, you know, all three poems, *Mother Poem*, *Sun Poem* and *X/Self* are much more autobiography than the earlier work.

SB I suppose because it was announced as the closing book of the second trilogy it seemed to me to be bringing all those concerns that run through your work to a kind of conclusion...

EKB Yes, well it successfully did that, I hope, but the matter I was wrestling with in *X/Self* is somehow... I get the feeling that there are four books. *X/Self* is probably not quite the end of that particular phase. I'm not sure yet.

SB I was interested in the poem that played around with the language of the word processor, especially in terms of thinking about using nation-language... the poem is full of puns between the two kinds of language.... as if you were drawing attention to a kind of tension between technology and the history/conditions from which nation-language emerges..?

EKB No, quite the opposite. What I was saying there was that technology makes nation-language easier... the 'global village' concept, the message is the medium and all that... The poem was saying that the computer has made it much easier for the illiterate, the Caliban, actually to get himself visible.

SB In what way?

EKB Simply because the computer does it all for you. You don't have to be able to type, you can make mistakes and correct them or leave them, **you can see what you hear**. When I said "writing in light" that is the main thing about it—the miracle of that electronic screen means that the spoken word can become visible in a way that it cannot become visible in the typewriter where you have to erase physically.

SB But isn't there some kind of a contradiction in the idea of an essentially oral language somehow being made more accessible via such a visual technology?

EKB Not really. I think that the computer has moved us away from scripture into some other dimension which is "writing in light". It is really nearer to the oral tradition than the typewriter is. The typewriter is an extension of the pen. The computer is getting as close as you can to the spoken word—in fact it will eventually I think be activated by voice and it will be possible to sit in front of the computer and say your poem and have it seen.

SB Perhaps that would help overcome that resistance to Caribbean poetry we heard about from the Education Officer this morning. She said that the teachers here in Jamaica were finding ways to avoid teaching Caribbean poetry, that they'd rather stick to the standard English poets they were brought up on, because they felt the Caribbean stuff was too 'difficult', too obscure....

EKB That's what they say but this is simply because schools have not been teaching Caribbean culture. If they start with the culture I think the poems will follow easily.

SB Are you optimistic that the education system is changing that way, or adapting...?

EKB I'm not worried about that, what I'm optimistic about is the constant arrival of powerful forces of cultural expression wherever you turn, and you know when one person dies or is eroded you have the emergence of a Chalkdust or a Bob Marley or a Michael Smith. I mean I think that this is constantly liberalising the Caribbean. What I'm looking forward to now is another Eric Williams kind of person who synthesises this whole experience from 1950 to the present which hasn't really been looked at as yet. The total thing.

SB For me, coming back to Jamaica after such a long time, I'm struck by two things that seem to have changed the nature of the society, one is the extent of American influence everywhere.

EKB Of course, of course..

SB ...its 'visibility', and in terms of the general culture. And the other, perhaps related in some way, is the widespread fear of violence, of armed robbery etc. that seems to have spread out from the city right across the island. Even up on the north coast and in Brown's Town everybody has their burglar bars and dogs and alarms, and all the horror stories... Kingston was like that when I was here but not the rest of the island, you left everything open and that was part of the West Indian way of life.. you know the 'call and enter' sort of thing.

EKB I know. You're right and that is a note that is very dread. To me it seems as if there is a race between the two forces, Michael Smith is a good example, his brilliant talent overwhelmed by the stone. And I don't know just who will win out in the end but people are still emerging despite all that and finding new ways to emerge too. Whether there will be enough nourishment and protection we'll still have to wait and see.

SB 'Jah Music', the title poem of your latest collection, seems to deal with some of those issues. Can you tell me about the incident that sparked that poem.

EKB What happened was that—no, let me give you what I think really happened apart from the event itself, you know—this is going on tape, right?!—the U.S. had been experimenting with alteration of atmosphere, creation of storms, droughts and things and I suspect that what happened in Jamaica was intended for Cuba, that's part of what the poem is about. There was this dramatic cloudburst over a small area of Westmorland called Newcastle, an area which already had a very high water table and because of this the cloudburst caused the death of a large number of children, among others. So the poem is about that downpour and that catastrophe but it also makes links with the death of Count Ossie which took place about the same time and a whole series of other disasters that took place,... at the stadium there was a stampede because of another rainstorm and children were killed there too, so that the storm to me was a symbol that Jamaica had entered a new 'Season of Anomy'. That's what the poem was attempting to say, and to suggest that this singing of a spiritual about

rain was a song to counter it, to counter the devastation.

SB Are there positive things about America's presence in the Caribbean?

EKB I can't think of any positive things because they have made no effort to understand the culture and to really live with it in terms of equality. I mean they are imposing what they call 'necessary ideas' and they are doing it through government agencies. No there is nothing positive at all. I made a speech once at the Institute of Jamaica at an exhibition coming out of New Orleans on Voodoo, Carnival and these things and I said quite innocently, but purposefully, that New Orleans is part of the Caribbean and the American Ambassador's assistant got up to upbraid me and to, you know, fly the flag. The whole point is that parts of America are also parts of the Caribbean and until they can see that they are just being Imperialist.

SB Flying here from Trinidad the plane touched down at San Juan in Puerto Rico, but they wouldn't let transit passengers off the plane. It was the only island where you weren't allowed off... it seemed significant...

EKB I know. You might 'escape' into the United States!

SB Visually just looking at that city as we flew across and comparing it with other cities of the region...

EKB Dreadful urbanisation, the whole island is a city now and that's what we are hoping to avoid but I don't think we will. It's not only the overt Americanisation but the influence of the multi-nationals, the destruction of landscape. The places where I learned to write my poetry in Barbados are covered with hotels and I wonder how the young Brathwaites, if there are such in Barbados at all, where will they relate to nature? Because you can't really relate to the Hilton Hotel. There's less and less of Barbados available for just casual interest and thought.

SB And the north coast of Jamaica...

EKB It's just wiped out. *Rights of Passage* is based on Jamaica's north coast to a significant degree you know, I was living there at the time..... Now I don't think it would be possible to have done that.

SB I wanted to ask you about the importance of performance, in relation to your own work and nation-language poetry generally. It ties in

with what you were saying earlier about the 'development' of that work?

EKB It's very important. You can see it from how the audiences respond. But I want to say something about my own poetry, because I think there's always a little confusion about my work in that I don't perform at all, it's my poetry that does it. I hardly move my body. And I think that the critics ought to begin to look at that because it's something that I think is my major contribution, if any, to the whole development of our poetry, that the words on the page have a metaphorical life of their own. I do not depend upon walking up and down on the stage and doing things. People have the impression that I'm performing when in fact they are actually dealing with poetry as they ought to, that is, the poetry is singing in their ears.

SB And that explains the way the poems are laid out on the page as well.

EKB Very much so, because it's part of my own concept of how they should sound and a hopeful aid to another reader. Now I find that every time I've heard someone perform my poetry or read it that I have learnt a lot from it. People say they can't do it but I find that when those who have done it do it they bring another interpretation which is equally valid to the material and I wish that more people would attempt it. I learnt a lot about my own poetry from listening to Dem Two in the days when they used to do it but then I also heard the dramatisations of *Mother Poem* and *Rights of Passage* and again it's amazing how, you know, at Carifesta in Cuba the dramatisation of *Mother Poem* there by Michael Gilkes got, every night, standing ovations from the Cubans, and that is because of the interpretation that these actors were able to get into it and although they couldn't understand the English the performance nature of the metaphors gave them communication aid.

SB How do you respond to what Ramchand has said about the difficulty of actually 'making sense' of the texts...?

EKB I think that Ramchand says that because he doesn't like the texts. I don't think that's a criticism at all. He has not given me any philosophical background for his statements. I think that is in a sense personal animus, I don't understand his kind of statements at all. Frankly I don't understand that kind of sniping. The texts are there and I think they are either, as he says of *Mother Poem* foolishness, incomprehensible childishness and gibberish, or they make sense.

And the texts make sense because they have a syntax that makes sense, they have a rhythmic structure that reinforces that sense and they have a cultural context which you either know or you don't. When they go on sniping at this kind of thing I think they are only sniping at the development of Caribbean literature which is a multi-faceted and multi-voiced development you know, and I think it is high time that critics began to see the 'ecumenical' nature of our development.

SB I get the sense that you feel yourself rather an embattled figure in Caribbean literature?

EKB I've always been, for some strange reason. I mean I've never consciously found myself encouraged by the environment and the community in which I live. I mean they (the literary academics) spend their time trying to demonstrate that the poems are either false or, as Dash is now saying, hysterical, or that they don't make sense or that they are irrelevant. I have never had any conscious on-going encouragement from my peers on the subject and that has always puzzled me. For instance, other than Rohlehr, the critics who have written about the development of dub poetry don't mention my name when in fact I would have thought that the dub poets come out of my work. When people ignore that I believe they are damaging not only my work but the whole development of the literature.

SB Is there any reason why...

EKB You would have to give me the answer to that... I don't know why it has always been so. The last thing was Dash's review of *Jah Music* and again we had Gordon's (Rohlehr) reply, which I'm amazed at how generous and wide ranging his responses are to that because what had been worrying me was that no one had apparently seen Dash's remarks as offensive.

SB Does it all go back, do you think, to that debate we touched on at the beginning, in *SAVACOU*? And the last big Caribbean literature conference here in '72 when this sense of 'factions' within the literary community really became apparent?

EKB Yes it goes back to that. That was the division point. But a lot of other people who were also in that battle have been, let us say, forgiven, but I seem to remain the man who they go on struggling against...

SB Is that not perhaps because you're seen to have 'won' the argument...?

EKB I don't get the feeling I've won at all, but it could be. A lot of things have happened since then which have been on the side of what I was saying.

SB Indeed some of the people who seemed to be on the other side of that battle, so far as it was a battle, are now championing the kind of material that they then seemed to condemn...

EKB But not including my work in the championship. Strange. Still no doubt some historian will come to put it all together.

SB It's very striking though, seeing both you and Walcott here, how you both 'move'. You, however uncomfortably, 'at home', Walcott obviously the visiting celebrity, constantly performing... which turns him into a kind of monster because nobody will say Boo! to him, nobody will tell him to shut up...

EKB That's another weakness of our culture, that we put people up on pedestals and then they/we can't really do much else, you know. It doesn't seem to have affected Walcott's work though.

SB Do you not think so? The recent books seem to me much more 'distant'...

EKB I don't think so. My impression is that what he's into now is mediating between North and South, which is a completely original position. He's the only person doing it and in that area he is supreme, I mean he's doing it remarkably well. I don't always go along with him, reading it, but I mean I can see what he's trying to do. What I also hope he will go on to do is not to forget the other people in the Caribbean as his success becomes more assured. In other words begin to refer to other Caribbean writers and let the American public become aware of them because he himself is very conscious, as he says often, that he's not a phenomenon, he's not unique, he comes out of a culture. I think he ought to begin to give the American public examples of these people so that they can begin to extend their interest rather than concentrate on a single individual. It's something that I've always done, I mean with the Caribbean Writers Movement and everything, I don't believe in having it all for one's self.

SB Do you feel that your sense of being in an 'embattled' position, that

we were talking about before, has affected the way you write?

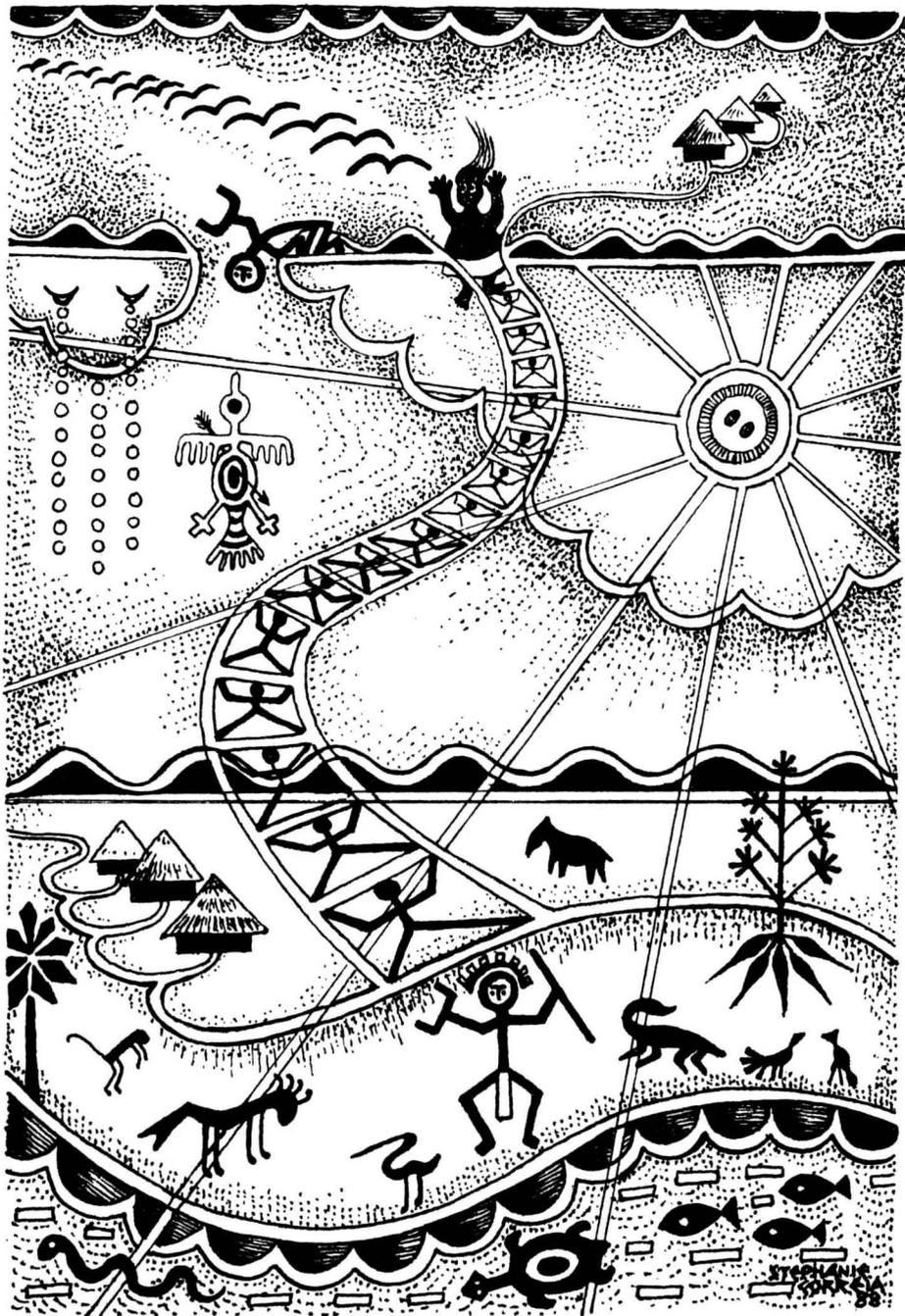
EKB No, I don't think so. I mean one doesn't know, but I don't think so because when I'm writing it's me and the words. The embattlement only creates more tension and a little more sardonic humour perhaps, but I can't think of any effect that it's had. One of the effects that is negative though is that it has stopped my work from reaching a lot of areas where it could have. I mean students at this university for instance are actively discouraged from studying my work.

SB Truly?

EKB Yes. If you look at the number of MAs and PhDs that have come out on Brathwaite I don't think there's a single one since 19... whenever-it-was they started studying Caribbean Literature here...

HOW THE WARRAUS FOUND EARTH

In upper world the Warraus lived with only birds for food
Til' one day Okonorote shot a bird so rainbow-hued.
Straight through a hole in the earth it went
And the hunter looked down in astonishment—
Seeing mountains, rivers, forests green, and animals great and small,
That the tribe would move to earth at once was agreed by one and all.
On a swaying cotton ladder they went safely to the trees below,
Lived happily there, except Rainstorm, who was always full of woe.
She climbed up again to upper world but in the hole stuck fast
For good food on earth for many moons had made her grow so vast.
And when clouds gather and rain falls down the Warraus would often say
Poor Rainstorm is sad and all alone, poor Rainstorm is crying today.



The poetic voice in Mark McWatt's *Interiors* is both essentially Guyanese and acutely Caribbean. In this work, his first published collection of verse, the art is mature, the craftsmanship sure. The poems seem to echo and incorporate aspects of the most accomplished writing by Guyanese to date. There is the brocaded texture of Wilson Harris's prose, the impeccable literary form of Martin Carter's work, the historical consciousness expressed by A.J. Seymour and the invested sensuality of person, object and place often present in Mittelholzer's earlier novels.

Moreover, the theme offers itself as a classic example of what Jeffrey Robinson sees as that present in major works by Guyanese writers. In *The Guyanese-ness of Guyanese Writing* (Kyk-over-al, No. 31, June 1985) Robinson writes that this theme is "the relationship between the mind and the world and between both of these, considered as a dialectic, and time". He continues that the "relationship between mind and landscape is often such that the latter functions as a mirror, becomes, in short, the ground of dreams" (my emphasis) McWatt, in the Preface to *Interiors* offers a strikingly similar explanation about these poems set in the interior of Guyana. "They are", he says:

"an attempt to understand or exercise certain powerful impressions of physical landscape inextricably bound up with equally powerful feelings... In many cases, these impressions are overlaid with more recent (adult) experiences or concerns in such a way that both the original impression and the recent experience are somehow displaced or transformed—becoming sometimes bewilderingly other".

In the collection, the "bewilderingly other" appears to be the "ground of dreams" referred to above, but viewed from a distance and in time. Landscape, especially the river which is a dominant image in the work, functions as a mirror for the poetic persona and is self-reflecting, self-revealing and self-elucidating.

In this use of literature for explication of the self, the collection is acutely Caribbean. Present in the late eighties is the same notion of identity which many see as clichéd and outmoded. But as Martin Carter has said in *Man and Making—Victim and Vehicle*, identity is not simply a theme but the "raison d'être" of Caribbean writing. *Interiors* validates this point since, for the poet, the present reality still seeks to explain itself in terms of the past, the adult in terms of the child and the aesthetic in terms of the physical.

Identity is necessary because the state of exile, that other component in Caribbean writing, is present as a central theme. Even though the distance

between Guyana, land of the poet's birth, and Barbados, present country of residence, is not very great, the landscapes are contrasting. And landscape determines mood and theme and may even affect poetic creed. *River Passage*, the central poem in the collection which is placed in the centre of the work and which is perceived as the "heartland of dreams" (*Orifice*) in "the ground of dreams" contains this confession of the change which occurs.

Since I stepped off the brink of a continent
and exchanged my granite certainties
for these sea-shell rumours of gold,
I have seen my dream of conquest
become death, my laughter
stiffen into the beat of clocks,
and my treasured map of the universe
appear as illegible as my hand.

The collection is divided into five sections. The third section *The Interior* is flanked by *Interiors of the Mind: Parts one and two* and *Interiors of the Heart: Parts one and two*. Each part related to mind (thought) or heart (feeling) has the same number of poems. Strict symmetry is, therefore, observed in the arrangement of sections. This is not simply an over-precise concern with appearance since the arrangement itself assists meaning. The shape of the structure is pyramidal with the "heartland of dream" at its apex or at its profoundest depth, depending on whether it is viewed in space or in the reflecting river/mirror. For in *Interiors* paradox is the key to understanding meaning. For example, *River Girl* begins with a stone flung into the river. The projectile which shatters the water/mirror becomes the vehicle for psychic introspection. In *The Native of Secrets* the dart which blinds also brings greater clarity of inner vision. The nave of "cathedral trees" in *On Hallowed Ground* suggests the blade of "the knife of circumcision" in ancient rites. In particular, the shape supports the dominant theme of journey and of the quest found in the earlier section of the work. This shape may be seen as the bow of the boat, vehicle and symbol found in *Hunting Light*, *Morawhanna* and several other poems. The physical progressions described in these poems are, inevitably, psychic explorations of the person, painful but necessary rites of passage towards self-elucidation and the present calm.

McWatt, in the Preface, explains that the divisions are not primarily an attempt to group the poems. However, there is often a cohesion that makes one imagine that this work is, in effect, one long poem. It begins, appropriately enough, with *Porknocker*, that legendary figure of quest. In this instance, the folk hero's sensitive fingers felt "the neck of stone"

for a vein of the mountain
until it convulsed in his hand
like the pulse of his desire
with sudden, secret data
to his brain.

Thus the sensual engenders the cerebral and brings about the scribal compulsion to record which is also the poet's vocation. In this opening poem, paradox is evident. Explosion of material brings implosion of insight and history is "fresh conceived". In *The Boat Builder*, the ordinary craftsman may be seen as the facilitator of the quest by virtue of his trade. By his seeking perfection in his craft he becomes an artist/creator, with the ensuing isolation that is the artist's fate. In *Hunting Light* and *On Hallowed Ground*, the last two poems of this opening section, the persona seems to be moving through a primal state of darkness towards enlightenment that is painful but bearable.

Interiors of the Heart: Part One presents poems which tell of adolescent sensuality perceived as memory/dream. The section begins with *River Girl* describing a mythical figure who excites "the first frantic song of (his) blood/roostering (his) indifference". The river girl is not only the sexual initiator, "legs afire on the forehead of the sun", but the high priestess who carries out purification rites and also the poet's Muse, elusive but compelling, and unforgettable. Sensuality, landscape, ritual and poetic craftsmanship are henceforth inextricable. The resultant experience brings the enlightenment contained in this "message".

Life and love we learn to fashion
like all fabric
into gifts and constellations of memories:

like the star one gives to a frightened child
with his own bundle and name
to travel the burning waterfall
to drink the wines of space.

The love-song of the river girl
begins and ends each poem's world.

Contrasting in tone are two poems which reflect the adolescent phase of attraction to older women. In *Remembering Anna Regina*, place is personified as a whore and the memory/dream of hasty coupling is unsatisfactory. Exile, however, transforms the nature of the relationship to compassion and even pain. In *Lady Northcote* the steamer is personified as the "perfect lady of adolescent dreams" exciting yet forbidden.

This vehicle as symbol links that second section to the core of the work, *The Interior*. In *Lady Northcote*, the persona participates in the steamer journey with excitement for its own sake, from Kumaka landing. In *Morawhanna*, the first poem of the core section, the reverse steamer journey brings memories of loss of a dead father. Morawhanna is the mouth of the river, gateway to the interior of the country and gateway to the "heartland of dreams". The idea of ancestry, compassion and "foundered dreams" found in this first poem is taken up again in *Mt. Everard* and more especially in *The Native of Secrets*, where once again "the riddle of all the ages" spoken by the sphinx-like ancestor expresses truth.

You cannot grieve with me
because you do not know
Because you do not know,
your laughter lights my eyes.

River Passage, the nucleus of the work, "The heartland of dreams," is also the most esoteric of all the poems. Here, the dream self, the desired other seen in *Golden Flower*, undergoes symbolic rites of passage following the baptism/immersion in the "womb flesh fire" of the water. The personal odyssey, perceived in time, brings a sense of regret for an earlier rapport when

The boy's riot of desire
could reverse all the real,
could make the waterfall his own finger
of fire, exploring the faces of stone,
and faces beneath the faces.

This notion of loss is underlined by the poems in the latter part of the section which emphasise incipient darkness, loss, alienation and finally exile. There is the image of the dying sun in *Night comes to the River* which leaves on the lower world "The base metal of incipient night", fear and intimations of mortality. In *Hillside: Hosororo* and *Ireng*, the rivers are viewed from a distance and the river deities have lost their acolyte. But for this loss of faith and home there is a certain accommodation and finally compensation. *Beyond Punta Playa*, the closing poem of this core section, expresses this transition in the final stanzas.

The passage overhead of red birds
opening the eye of the third day
suggests the casting of thoughts in stones
or nets to rake the glass from river floors
Words and their shadows in the sun
paint perceptions of another home.

That other home is the setting of the last two divisions, the poems of which form one third of the total collection.

Although it is *Interiors of the Heart: Part One* and not *Part Two* that is dedicated to Amparo, the poet's wife, she replaces the river girl and becomes the domestic Muse. Adolescent sensuality has developed into adult love which can dispel even the "sphere of horror" and fears of mortality. This philosophy is particularly dominant in *Between the Lines*, quoted below, but also present in *Love and the Mind*, 'Ah my dear', and *Missing*.

Between the parted lines
of your lips and mine

wafts that fearful breath of life
that bears us towards death.
Yet when we kiss
it is the quick pulse of your lips
that my heart reads,
and to all else is blind.

Whereas in *Bridegroom* in *Interiors of the Heart: Part One*, nature and woman are incarnate in each other and inextricable, here in the poems of this later section, the suffusion is that of literature and love, philosophy and passion.

In the final section, the trailblazer is not the porknocker of the first section but Rabiavarello "the black glass-maker" who fashions the poet a mirror to perceive new visions and teaches the "mind to live in a different land". The neck of stone in *Porknocker* is replaced in *Stone* by that of a fossil found on an empty beach under a "hard sky". Yet this section opens and closes [with notes of] compassion for two different kinds of Single Women, the maiden aunt and the feminist. And here perhaps is the greatest paradox in a work riddled with paradoxes. Despite the careful separation of mind and heart in divisions and groups, there can be no neat, discrete divisions. The work itself as Word, as literature, reflects the perfect synthesis of the dialectic of thought and feeling, intellect and compassion.

REVIEW

FINE LINES OF COMMITMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY

by Al Creighton

A Tale from the Rain Forest by Edward Baugh

Sandberry Press, Kingston, 1988; 55 pp.

Journey Poem, by Pamela Mordecai

Sandberry Press, Kingston, 1989; 56 pp.

“there’s no such thing as ‘only literature’.

Every line commits you.

... And if you plead
you never meant them,
then feel responsibility”

Edward Baugh reminds us of this fact about the nature of literature while seeming to embrace a theory of poetry which many of us share. In the poem “Truth and Consequences”, which was inspired by the lynching of Cinna the Poet in Shakespear’s *Julius Caesar*, Baugh alludes to the social responsibility and accountability of the poet, showing such claims as “I never meddled in politics” to be invalid.

A Tale from the Rainforest is Baugh’s first published collection, and he places this ‘commitment’ very early in the volume, after three selections which establish the fact of language as the base of literature. He “tests [his] wings / and tunes [his] throat”, trying the power of words, yet wishing to rise above their inadequacy to reach sentiment, gesture, meaning and even truth, which are the real things that “the consoling agony of words” can only strive to represent.

In this volume, Baugh presents autobiography, dilemmas of identity, portraits of people and places which seem to convince us further of his social commitment and conscience. One might even say he presents the usual range of subjects that may be found in any Caribbean collection. But the poems are too sharply crafted, using the language(s) he finds limited, with effective ease and sometimes amazing clarity; too deep and thorough for any suspicion of fashionableness or cliché of which he seems cautiously aware. He reveals “the secret” about one of his poet-personae:

He really had nothing to say ...
about important topics
like poverty and politics, ..
he never even wrote
a rodney poem. (19)

Thus warned off, ironically, from any temptation to accuse him of trying to be fashionable, we note the volume's inclusion of political verse.

Perhaps to be better able to carry the burden of a poet's responsibility, Baugh seeks further fortification from courtship of the Muse in a number of selections. He pursues this sometimes in sensuous metaphor after the archetypal merging of muse and woman and including his own exploration of woman as symbol (something more than 'object'), as both inspirational source and subject of desire, and as metaphor of sensuality, but always less chauvinist than lust. His approach to this will win the approval of Pamela Mordecai, who, in her own first published collection *Journey Poem*, offers female personae who admit to being objects of sensuality and provokers of desire

... I have strong limbs
to make a lap of love
a brow to gaze at in
the quiet times half light and
lips for kissing: I'm well
fixed for all love's traffic (16)

But one will do well not to be fooled by, but to heed the transparency of such glib conversational voices in Mordecai and recognize contemptuous disapproval of lustful superficialities (note the chilling challenge of "So tell me, brother/What have you to give?").

Baugh's interest in the female form/being is complex and he puts her to interesting uses across poems in the collection in which she allows him to give shape and expression to emotions and unambiguous gestures that are superior to words. Just as Mordecai uses it, sensuousness is mainly catalyst to less 'sub-lunary' concerns such as realisation of some cosmic state.

In the title poem, "A Tale from the Rainforest", courtship of the Muse achieves its most successful climax in the book. Here she is bird, girl, even whore, and the rivermaid is procurer. The bird comes to the poet and whispers "My sister the rivermaid sent me./She told me you would be kind./...They made music/together until/the rivermaid called time"/ (Baugh: 28). "Time" is used in the double contexts of music and the brothel. The bird/muse brings him the grief of the rainforest which assumedly will inspire committed verses. Like Dennis Scott (1973; cf "Bird of Passage" and elsewhere, e.g. *Uncle Time*, 1972, *Dreadwalk*, 1981), Baugh explores bird as well as creative voice and symbol in this collection.

With this fortification, the book seeks to fulfil its responsibility to truthful records of experience which Mordecai also attempts with consistent sincerity. It covers personalities and issues with a vision, sensitivity and language that are not classbound; but rather, if at times a position is betrayed, it is surprisingly proletarian. And, furthermore, he tosses gentle ridicule at himself as middle-class professor in describing a country dance: "We had come seeking the true folk/the immaculate idea untouched by irony" and distances his own limited

boyhood sensibility from middle-class taboos in treating the family's hush-hush at the mysterious death of his youthful aunt.

Alongside the crisp efficiency of his Standard English, Baugh's Creole voices are skin-tight and thoroughly authentic in consciousness. Yet, one wonders why a Creole persona is depicted going in search of the dubious "tenth muse" who has to be explained to him by an awkwardly introduced "friend who study / literature"

It is, perhaps, primarily a convenient exercise to compare Baugh with Pamela Mordecai because they have both published first volumes, new contributions to the geometrically developing Caribbean Literature, after they have both been writing and being anthologised for years. Comparison is not really the intention here, but more than their being both "university wits" who transcend their class backgrounds, is the sharing by Mordecai of Baugh's commitment to "accurate iambs" about the human condition in this society. Since the muse cannot even try to accommodate her by being, at least, androgynous, she draws strength from a confident and forthright woman's fortitude. "I am a woman / of a fierce green place / my brows are mountains" (Mordecai: 13).

She is bolder than Baugh in an uninhibited striding out into modernism as form, in kinship with other Caribbean modernists Mervyn Morris, Dennis Scott, Tony McNeill and Olive Senior. *Journey Poem* helps to place her in the very top bracket among female poets in the Caribbean. Although to brand her feminist/womanist might be a non-sequitur, much of the poems' vitality, moral strength and commanding, sometimes superior tone, develops from what appears to be a woman's consciousness of what is right, just, wholesome and what is due her. She celebrates womanhood as producer and protector of life as well as a creature of sensuality as much as she asserts liberating individuality, a fulfilling self-discovery and a frank unemotional truth.

There are undercurrents of protest, images of the long-suffering struggle of self-sacrificing motherhood:

She prayed who set her back
against the world to plant
you deep for long life
and everyday gave thanks (Mordecai:31)

Mordecai's images often go beyond sensuality (and Baugh's sensuous metaphors) to obvious eroticism which is associated with some of her several expressions of fertility (sometimes a celebration of it) and with the fulfilment of love, growth and freedom which the woman demands. This kind of awakening and insistence on individual growth is as much a preoccupation in this book as is the ubiquitous fecundity which itself becomes a metaphor/symbol for other kinds of "greening", fulfillment and celebrations of life.

Pamela Mordecai's *Journey Poem* is the book as a collective (there is no title poem) which takes us with her through various metaphorical journeys or her/(our) one journey. Like Baugh's preserved memories of his Portland

(Eástern Jamaica) background, she gives us autobiographical glimpses at the start of her "journey". But, always more personal in subject and modes of expression than her elder colleague who uses autobiography to draw attention mainly to other things, she employs it sometimes to focus herself.

This journey, though, begins with her mother's and her grandfather's tragic walks ("My mother / was a walker ... her father / walked one morning ... down / into the sea":9) which set the tone, take us not only through revelations of self, but through a few hard facts about life and sometimes about struggle.

Among the things that one will remember from this collection is the ring of Mordecai's strident voice which often scolds and often demands your attention from some superior consciousness ("what you should know is ..." "What you must also know ..." "I am saying, did someone teach you ...").

Sometimes, though, it is very necessary; her conversational tone is device. In one case—she deliberately wishes to talk down and in "Last Lines" she swears that every victim of social-political-personal exploitation and wrong will survive. "You see this place? You see it? / ... Watch it good. / Not a jot nor a tittle / going lost / ... I swear to you, / every last one shall live."

It is a poem such as this powerful one which makes Pamela Mordecai succeed through this voice and tone and which summarises her concern and the commitment she shares with Edward Baugh. *Journey Poem* and *A Tale From the Rainforest* are not just additions to contemporary Caribbean verse, they may be placed with the best of it. Baugh's authority and Mordecai's positive confidence make one wonder why these books took so long to appear.

Draw therefore, O governor,
prime minister, parson,
teacher, shopkeeper,
politician, lecturer,
resonant revolutionaries,
draw carefully
that last fine line
of your responsibility. (Mordecai: 53/54)

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