A great many individuals and organisations have contributed to the success of Kyk-Over-Al since it was relaunched in December, 1984. We owe a very special debt of appreciation to the following for their support of this issue No. 38 and the forthcoming issue No. 39. Their vigorous assistance so readily offered in strengthening an important part of Guyana's cultural tradition deserves the thanks of the whole community.

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The Editors would welcome the submission of poems, short stories, articles and reviews to consider for publication. Publication of course cannot be guaranteed and because of expense it will not be possible to return manuscripts. Submissions may be accompanied by illustrations and photographs of authors, suitable for black-and-white reproduction.

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150th ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARRIVAL OF EAST INDIANS IN GUYANA

Celebration by the Guyana Commemoration Commission

*Kyk-Over-Al* is happy to join the Guyana Commemoration Commission in observing the 150th Anniversary of the Arrival of East Indians in Guyana. This magazine has played its part over the years in publishing the work of Caribbean writers of East Indian origin and in recording East Indian strands in the pattern of Guyanese and West Indian cultural life.

A number of special events have been organised to mark this significant anniversary in May. These include a 3-day conference at the Pegasus Hotel; Book, Photographic, and other Exhibitions; and a variety of cultural activities and displays. India will be sending a large party of artistes, academics, and other representatives to participate in the celebration. A number of publications to mark the 150th Anniversary are being produced, including a reprint of Peter Ruhoman's "History of East Indians in Guyana" and a new anthology of poetry and prose.

East Indians, surviving and rising above indenture, as Africans survived and rose above slavery, have become an important part of our social, economic and cultural mosaic. Of the nearly 5 million people of the Commonwealth Caribbean East Indians comprise over 20 per cent of the population. Their contribution to literature, scholarship, and art in Guyana and the whole region is of great and growing importance. Their presence in politics, trade unions, business, art, religion, architecture, dress and customs has added immeasurably to the richness of Caribbean culture.

At the same time, the lives and attitudes of East Indians in their new home-land have been significantly transformed. The occasion of the 150th Anniversary of their arrival will provide a valuable opportunity to examine the rich contribution made by East Indians and assess their transformed presence within the West Indian society and culture.
ACROSS THE EDITORS’ DESK

THE GUYANA PRIZE

A literary highlight for the whole region was the Guyana Prize Awards ceremony which took place at the National Cultural Centre in Georgetown on December 8th 1987. In this issue of Kyk we carry both Dr Gordon Rohlehr’s outstanding feature address and Wilson Harris’s deeply considered thoughts on the occasion. At the ceremony President Desmond Hoyte made the awards to the prizewinners. It was, the President said later, an occasion “typically Guyanese, dignified yet full of liveliness and humour”. He also saw it becoming “an important landmark in our national evolution”. The editors of Kyk agree with that. In a radio programme aired on the day itself this view was expressed:

"Tonight the winners of the first-ever Guyana Prize will be announced and the awards will be presented to the prizewinners. A sense of history tells us that this is a moment that will be treasured in the future annals of Guyana and the wider West Indies. Long after anniversaries which now seem important have been forgotten the first awards of the Guyana Prize will be remembered.

This is the first time in Guyana and the English-speaking West Indies that literature and writers have been given such substantial recognition in their own homeland. The awards themselves are of significant value but, more than that, the Guyana Prize, and the publicity and ceremonies which surround it, proclaim the vital role which writers have played and should play in society. Other countries have greatly honoured our writers. Now we begin to honour them ourselves. President Hoyte, in announcing the Prize in February, summed up the intention simply but memorably: “We must give stature and status to our makers of words as we do to our makers of things”.

Material success is important to a nation, just as money is important to a man. The saying is not that man does not live by bread, the saying is that man does not live by bread alone. And St Paul did not say that money is the root of evil, he said love of money is the root of evil. However, material success and money cannot in themselves be worthy ends. Dante said it well in the ninth book of “The Paradiso”:

“You were not born to live the lives of brutes
But beauty to pursue and knowledge high”.

After all, what is material success for? It cannot be for its own sake because then a stuffed pig would be the most realised creature on earth. Human beings must always ask themselves Tolstoy’s question: “What do men live by?”

The achievement of Guyanese and West Indian writers in the last 25 years is remarkable by any standard. The works of our literary people have risen above the petty politics and the endemic economic problems which have plagued the region. Long after the contradictions and difficulties of
our postcolonial societies have been forgotten; the books produced by our writers will have found a permanent place among the valuable, enduring works of man.

Countries in the region have been amazingly indifferent to the writers of universal significance whom we have produced and indifferent also to the art of writing itself. It is as if we continued to produce our great cricketers and yet despised and belittled the game of cricket itself. If for no other reason than a shrewd awareness of the international kudos that comes with outstanding literary and intellectual achievement one would have thought that the authorities would have fallen over themselves to find and foster our writing talent. That has not been the case.

But now we have a start, perhaps a symbol, of something different and better in the Guyana Prize. It is absolutely vital that a nation should foster and honour its writers. The good writer devotes his energy to searching for truth. And in the love of truth, straight and unvarnished, lies not only the hope but the safety of a nation. "The people need poetry", the great Russian poet, Osip Mandelstam, wrote "to keep them awake forever". The good writer, the true writer, as Cyril Connolly said in "Enemies of Promise".

"helps to unmask those pretenders which accompany all human plans for improvement: the love of power and money, the short-sighted acquisitive passions, the legacies of injustice and ignorance, the tiger instinct for fighting, the ape-like desire to go with the crowd. A writer must be a lie-detector who exposes fallacies in words and ideals before half the world is killed for them."

The great writer, the great artist of any sort, as the French novelist Andre Gide insisted, must bear a wound -

"That wound which we must never allow to heal but which always remains painful and bleeding, the gash made by contact with hideous reality."

In a small but significant and symbolic way, the Guyana Prize begins to recognise the unsung, deep-lying, passionate, life-giving work that writers perform in a nation. For that reason tonight's ceremony will indeed represent an authentic, vital piece of this nation's history in the making."

A FLOWERING OF WEST INDIAN JOURNALS?

The anguished cry has often been heard, at least in Guyana, that there are only the most meagre outlets for West Indian writers, literary critics and scholars to express themselves at home and abroad. The claim is certainly true if the amount of raw talent and potential is measured against the available vehicles for expressing that talent and potential. It is even more certainly true if one considers the matter in terms of opportunities to publish book-length, beautifully produced, widely distributed works locally and regionally. Gordon Rohlehr, in his address at the Guyana Prize Awards ceremony, lamented the continuing, inexcusable lack of a full-fledged CARICOM publishing house.

However, as one surveys the scene regionally, it begins to dawn
on one that the outlets for literary and cultural and academic expression are growing in number, quality, and range all the time. How far is this known by even writers, much less ordinary West Indian laymen? Let us see. There are the old-established Bim in Barbados, Kyk-Over-Al in Guyana (revived in December, 1984, after a long absence), and The New Voices in Trinidad - all of them obviously meeting a badly felt need for literary expression, if the amount of material submitted to us in Kyk is anything to go by. The Caribbean Quarterly continues to play its vital part. But, apart from these, there are a number of other journals which now grace the literary, cultural and academic scene, all but one of them very new. These are noted below. Indeed, given the state of isolation from each other in which Caricom countries customarily live, there may well be other interesting publications we are not even aware exist.

Jamaica Journal
This, of course, is not a newcomer. It has been coming out for 20 years. It is now published quarterly. Jamaica Journal is a magnificent, beautifully illustrated magazine that deserves a wide audience throughout the West Indies and indeed further afield. It is a marvellous example of what a well-balanced, scholarly yet very readable magazine of literature, the arts, historical research, national history and society in general should aim to be. We remember reading in it once an article on the life and art of endangered species" in that island. This "magazine of Barbadian life and culture" is beautifully produced and printed. It carries a full quota of excellent photographs and illustrations. The annual subscription (2 issues) is Barbados $18.00. You should write to: The Editor, Banja, National Cultural Foundation, West Terrace, St. James, Barbados.

Journal of West Indian Literature
JWIL is a new academic magazine which began publication in October, 1986. It is a twice-yearly publication of the Department of English of the University of the West Indies. It is edited by Mark McWatt. The two issues we have seen are of outstanding,
scholarly quality - not perhaps suitable for the ordinary layman, but certainly for the benefit of anyone at all interested in West Indian literature past, present, and future. Its aim is expressed in the following:

"The editors invite the submission of articles that are the result of scholarly research in the literature of the English-speaking Caribbean. The editors will also consider for publication articles on the literature of the non-English-speaking Caribbean, provided such articles are written in English and have a clear relevance to the themes and concerns of Caribbean literature in English or are of a comparative nature, comparing Caribbean literature in another language with that in English. JWIL will also publish book reviews".

The annual subscription (two issues) is US$15.00. You should write to: The Editor, Journal of West Indian Literature, Department of English, University of the West Indies, P.O.Box 64, Bridgetown, Barbados.

The Caribbean Writer

Volume 1, Number 1 of The Caribbean Writer, published in St. Croix, came out in spring, 1987. It is a magnificently, expensively produced magazine of 100 pages devoted entirely to poetry, short stories and reviews. The artwork and printing are superb. If this continues it will clearly be an extremely important outlet for West Indian poets and writers of fiction. The Introduction to the first issue, by the President of the University of the Virgin Islands, reads as follows:

"Recognising the widespread interest in creative writing and the paucity of local outlets for such writing, the Caribbean Research Institute has expanded its focus in order to meet this community need. The University of the Virgin Islands, thus, proudly presents the premiere issue of The Caribbean Writer.

Literary magazines have traditionally played a vital role in fostering writing talent, and that is certainly one of our goals in sponsoring this new venture. Our hope is also that the existence of a high quality literary magazine based close to home will inspire new writers toward literary endeavour and that ultimately the audience for good literature will grow and prosper.

I look forward to ten or twenty years hence when we will point with pride to established writers who were first published in these pages. The University is indeed pleased to make such a valuable contribution to the Caribbean community through this landmark publication."

The Editor is Erika J Smilowitz and the Advisory Board includes well-known West Indian literary figures such as Derek Walcott, Mervyn Morris, Olive Senior, Alwyn Bully, and John Figueroa. Editorial and subscription correspondence should be sent to: Caribbean Research Institute, University of the Virgin Islands, RRO2, Box 10,000, Kingshill Post Office. St. Croix, V1 00850.
Caribbean Affairs

The introductory issue of this magazine was published for the first quarter of 1988. It is to come out four times a year, published by the Trinidad Express Newspapers. The magazine concentrates on politics and economics. The standard is very high. In the first issue, among other pieces, all of great interest, there are excellent articles by Michael Manley on "The Integration Movement", Anthony Maingot on "U.S. Strategy in Nicaragua", Raoul Pantin on A.N.R. Robinson, Alister McIntyre on "Developing Tourism", David de Caires on "Guyana After Burnham", Lloyd Searwar on "Decision-Making in Foreign Affairs", and Gordon Lewis on "The Imperialist Ideology and Mentality". There is also a thought-provoking article, "Caribbean Booktalk", by Wayne Brown, that should be the subject of much discussion in the Faculties of English at all Universities in the region.

Keith Smith, in his thoughtful introductory article, "Birth of the Journal", sets out what we can look forward to in the magazine in the following terms:

"In Caribbean Affairs, readers will find some of Keynes' "economic and political thinkers", but the difference is that their ideas come from their own laboratory and are rooted in the Caribbean experience - from Brazil, Suriname and the Guianas in the South to Mexico, the Bahamas and Cuba in the North. This is not to say, however, that their thinking has not been informed by the Euro-American intellectual tradition. When we consider the whole history of the Caribbean to insinuate anything of the kind would be naive, blind and lacking in good manners. But what we are presenting here for the first time in a single journal are examples of that new Caribbean intellectual tradition placed in the service of all Caribbean peoples - English, French, Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese-speaking - who have long struggled for a place of dignity in their own countries, for self-determination and self-respect and for the honour and enrichment of their brothers and sisters."

Caribbean Affairs is edited by Owen Baptiste. The subscription is TT$80 or US$20 annually (four issues). You should write to: Caribbean Affairs, P.O. Box 1252, Port of Spain, Trinidad.

There are certainly other publications of great interest. There is Antilia in Trinidad, the journal of the Faculty of Arts at U.W.I., St Augustine. It seems to come out irregularly but the three issues we have seen contain excellent literary investigation, scholarly articles, stimulating reviews and penetrating historical research. Ken Ramchand heads the Editorial Committee. Then in Guyana there is Kaie (the National History and Arts Council journal), which comes out irregularly but contains a good variety of academic and literary work of interest in Guyana and the wider region. And we have seen one copy of a magazine called Prince published in Antigua whose editors have brought out five issues up to June, 1987, and which contains some very interesting writing from that island. There must be others.

If just the publications we have noticed here were regularly and
widely available in the region surely no one could complain of lack of home-grown literary and intellectual fare. The problem, however, may be two-fold. First, there is the "endurance" problem. Will many of these publications last any length of time? A glossy, good-looking, well-produced and interesting first few issues only whets the appetite. If the magazine fizzles out after a couple of years, or less, that induces cynicism and reinforces the sort of self-doubt which is already too prevalent in the region.

Secondly, and even more importantly, how wide is the regional readership of these magazines? How many subscriptions to Jamaica Journal are there in Guyana? In at least some of the territories access to such publications is just about non-existent. The huge bureaucratic difficulties involved in remitting subscriptions and in some cases the absolute lack of foreign exchange, the deplorable state of intra-CARICOM mail services, the almost complete absence of properly organised means of distributing and selling books and magazines on anything but a tiny scale — these are reasons why the circulation of magazines like those mentioned here probably number in the tens rather than the hundreds in most territories in CARICOM other than the one in which each is published. And, of course, the consequent lack of a growing circulation all too easily leads to disillusion and a short life-span for the brave new venture.

Until a way can be found to establish a smoother, quicker, and wider spread of cultural exchange and distribution throughout the region, the odds are that the magazines we so enthusiastically launch will continue to make infinitely less impact on West Indians than the quality and range of their contents deserve. The even greater odds then are that such ventures will sooner rather than later fade away for want of a more universal audience. It baffles one completely why the CARICOM Secretariat, so often frustrated at the political, economic, and commercial level, does not turn more of its attention to a field so ripe for reform and so conducive to furthering at the deepest level the ideal of West Indian unity.

**DR A J SEYMOUR, CCH**

*Ian McDonald writes:*

*Kyk-Over-Al*, as well as its only begetter, is honoured by the award to AJS of the Cacique Crown of Honour in the 1988 Guyana Republic Day Honours list. It is an honour most richly deserved by this outstandingly dedicated and creative Guyanese and West Indian man of letters and learning. AJS founded Kyk in 1945 and edited it single-handedly during its palmiest and most influential period until 1961. Since the magazine was revived in December 1984, he has continued indefatigably as joint editor. It is an amazing, probably unique, contribution simply as editor.

For more than 50 years AJS has contributed to the cultural scene in a myriad of ways. In my Introduction to *AJS at 70*, published to mark his 70th birthday four years ago [and still available from Kyk—$50 by
mail), I tried to catch something of his incalculable pioneering effort:

"His life at one very important level is a record of 50 years of dedicated work in literature. He began in an era when everything was still to be done. Indeed, it may be that pioneers have to attempt too much. When young Seymour in the early 1930s seriously began to think what contribution he might make to life and letters in his homeland, consider how much needed to be done, how many moulds required breaking, how many initiatives needed to be taken. The Empire had not yet begun to fade. The status of his country was colonial, the mentality dependent, the heritage imperial, the culture derivative. Think of the varied challenges that must have faced a young man of sense and sensibility in those times. It must have almost seemed too much. There were poems to write whose themes were Guyanese and Caribbean and whose imagery was tropical and experienced, not temperate and second-hand. There was a whole new world of deeply felt historical experience to open up. There was new thinking to be done in half a dozen fields. Critical work had to be informed by different themes and original perspectives. So many fresh starts had to be made. A whole new context had to be prepared for the coming generations. The work that is done at the beginning of anything, like the foundations of a great building sunk beneath the earth, is least seen but is the most important part. Seymour as designer and architect of post-colonial structures of thought and art and writing in Guyana and the Caribbean is still to be fully assessed and properly acclaimed."

THE PRODUCTION OF KYK NO. 38

This is the second issue of Kyk to be printed by offset, from laser-printed camera-ready copy prepared by electronic "desktop publishing" methods. We are learning this powerful new technology somewhat by trial and error, as readers of No. 37 will have noticed from its too-small type. We apologise to those who found it hard to read, and to contributors whose work was done less than justice. Each succeeding issue should show improvement as we become more familiar with electronic page layout and laser printing. We have already gained in the speed of production, and are particularly delighted that the offset process allows us to feature visual art such as the striking work of Harold Bascom in this issue. Potential contributors of art pieces will, we hope, take note.
NOTES ON SIX MYTHICAL FIGURES OF GUYANA

by Harold A. Bascom

MOONGAZER (page 12 and cover)

The Moongazer is a giant spindly-legged white phantom that stands with legs astride trenches, roads, or even houses. Its main preoccupation is said to be just gazing in a fixed pose at the full moon in the middle of the night sky. Seeing the apparition in its majesties is the sole reason for its popularized horror.

BACOO (page 23)

The Bacoo is a midget demon having power to shower its owner with riches untold, that is, providing the owner grants the demon the things it demands in return for its services. The Bacoo is said to be satisfied with an endless supply of bananas and milk.

The Bacoo enraged is rumoured to be very vindictive. It is said that the demon will shower houses with pelted bricks. No one ever sees where the bricks come from in such incidents. The Bacoo is known to bring the owner poverty and misfortune.

The Bacoo on the rampage can only be caught and imprisoned in a bottle by an able spiritist. Once the bottle is corked and thrown away (best in rivers), the reign of the demon-tormentor is over, until someone unsuspectingly finds that bottle and uncorks it.

The Bacoo also manifests itself in the form of snakes.

OL’HIGUE (page 35)

Ol’Higue is a skinless vampire. It is said to be a woman who has the ability to shed her outer skin, change her form into a flying ball of fire that can dwindle to a speck of light that can enter a house by way of even a key-hole. Once inside the house, the Ol’Higue will proceed - once undisturbed - to suck the blood of a victim. Awareness of Ol’Higue visits is said to begin by observing that a once chubby healthy child or adult is growing thinner and thinner - paler and paler by the day. The most extreme form of affliction for the victim ends in death.

The Ol’Higue is most times an old woman, hence the name. But it is now said that this form of local vampire can be (in seeming road-walking innocence) a middle aged woman of beauty, or a pretty teen-aged girl.

JOMBIE (page 57)

Jombie (Jombee) is the name given to the ghost of a Guyanese deceased. The Jombie, though, is not likened to the ghost of popular fiction. It is not a whispy thing. In Guyanese ghost stories, the Jombie is most times only realized to be a ghost when the Jombie itself declares itself one. Until the declaration, the unsuspecting living-person thinks the Jombie is a flesh and blood human being.

The popular story is told of the late-walking guitarist who meets a man on the public road. The man tells the guitarist that he can play
the guitar also. And, borrowing the instrument, the man begins to strum and pick beautiful melodies.

Says the owner of the instrument: “Man...you can masterly play guitar!”

Says the player in reply: “Ah man...you ent hear nothing yet...You see when I was alive - I used to play sweeter than this!”

Jombies are also nasal speakers. They also are known to laugh through their nostrils - hence someone speaking in nasal tones ought to be watched closely, then sprinkled with holy water to remove doubts.

**BUSH DIE-DIE** (page 76)

Bush Die-Die is a bush spirit. Some people say that Bush Die-Die is the end result of an Amerindian wizard’s transformation from his purely human form. In Guyana, Bush Die-Die is popularized as a horrid freaky thing that is found in the hinterland forests.

**MASACOURAMAN** (page 87)

Masacouraman is a man-like water monster, popularized by pork-knockers of Guyana. This thing is very dangerous to man, since it makes humans part of its diet. Masacouraman is said to be very hairy and much larger than a man. It lives below the waters of hinterland rivers, lakes, and creeks. It is the Guyanese Loch Ness monster but much more menacing.

The original drawings, which measure 16in by 21in were executed by Harold Bascom in pen and ink in 1979, and are now held in the collection of Michael Cox, a Director of Arts Guyana Ltd. They are reproduced by kind permission of Michael Cox and the artist.
Mr. Chairman, Your Excellency the President, Ministers of Government, members of the Diplomatic Corps, friends and fellow-travellers in this vale of tears and laughter:

I would like first of all to say my sincere thanks for the honour which you have conferred on me by inviting me to address such a gathering on such an occasion. The establishment of the Guyana Prize for Literature in such hard times as these is an act of peculiar grace, equalled only by that first memorable Carifesta of 1972, which was also a Guyanese initiative. It isn't often - with all due respects to the Commonwealth Prize, the Booker Award or the W.H.Smith Award - that the Caribbean writer finds a serious sponsor.

Even in the area of research, it is generally easier to find a sponsor for research into our chaotic politics or our foundering economies, than into our remarkably vibrant literature. Thus, both creative writer and academic suffer in a situation where it is not unusual for publication to lag behind creation for ten years or more.

During the 1950s and 1960s Caribbean writing attracted the British publishing houses. It was new and passionate and signalled the eruption into visibility of the colonial person who, if he had never quite accepted his servitude, had at the same time never quite articulated his deepest and most burning necessity in a fiction and language that was unmistakably his own. Part of the interest of the British publisher no doubt lay in the fact that a relatively easy market existed for writing that was new and strange. There was, also, a curious pride and proprietorship; for this new writing was seen as demonstrating the flexibility of the English language. Despite the astringent satire which it directed at colonial education, the new literature was taken as proof of the virtues of that education which, against all odds, had taught inarticulate Caliban to speak.

One has only to read those inane reviews that used to appear in the West India Committee Circular, the journal of the old Sugar Interest, to realise that our literature was being promoted as a quaint curiosity, or as a marketable commodity whose meaning did not, and could not possibly, matter. At a 1971 conference, I heard more than one of our writers remark that it was only with the advent of West Indian critics and reviewers such as Edward Kamau Brathwaite who wrote long essays in Bim since 1957, that they gained a sense of what their work meant to the community for whom it was intended.

After the novelty of the 1950 to 1965 period had worn off and Reid, Mittelholzer, Lamming, Selvon, Naipaul, Salkey, Hearne, Harris and Walcott had been established as our most important voices, the willing sponsorship of British publishing houses was, it seems to me, tacitly reduced. One waited for a second wave of writers to follow in the wake
of the first. But this did not happen for several reasons. First of all, the writers of the fifties had said most of what it was possible to say about the folk life, politics and landscape of small impoverished societies. Secondly, the early elation had begun to encounter the hard realities of self-government and independence, and an already serious vision had darkened considerably by the mid-sixties. Thirdly, and most important: new writers were finding it increasingly more difficult to get published, the publishers being more concerned with the easier task of promoting already established voices, than with risking money and energy on the encouragement of fresh talent.

If we think of the writers who emerged between 1965 and 1970, we'd find that Jean Rhys was a survivor from nearly four decades earlier; Edward Kamau Brathwaite had been publishing poems in Bim since 1948 and was, like Walcott, only three years younger than Lamming; Michael Anthony and Earl Lovelace were among the few to be given exposure and encouragement in the immediate post-Independence period; while poets such as Denis Scott and Mervyn Morris, who had developed their own styles, would have to await the emergence of those brave little West Indian publishing houses, New Beacon and Bogle-L'Ouverture, who in the post-1970 period have borne the brunt of the new publishing. I must have at least one hundred poets in slim collections, which have been either self-published or are the results of the efforts of Savacou, Bim, Karia Press or the Extra-Mural Department of UWI.

While the presence of local and foreign-based Caribbean publishers is a sign of independence, there is a limit to the exposure which the small publisher can give to a writer. Sometimes an entire genre suffered from an inadequacy of promotion, as was the case with drama, which after the series of one-act plays published by the UWI Extra-Mural Department from the late fifties to the mid-sixties, went into a slump until the seventies, when the Walcott plays began to appear. Walcott's main publisher now is not British, but American.

Relief of a sort came with the short-lived Allison and Busby, who republished Lamming and C.L.R. James, and promoted the novels of Roy Heath. Relief of a sort has also come from Casa de las Americas, the Cuban publishing house, which in 1976 extended their annual literary competition to include writers from the Anglophone Caribbean. Guyanese writers such as Noel Williams, Angus Richmond, Harry Narain and John Agard have won the Casa prize. Edward Kamau Brathwaite has won it twice, once for Black & Blues, a collection of poems, and in 1986 for Roots, a collection of essays.

Very recently, through the agency mainly of West Indian publishers, we've seen the healthy and exciting emergence of several women writers such as Merle Collins, Grace Nichols, Erna Brodber, Velma Pollard, Olive Senior, Lorna Goodison, Christine Craig, Pamela Mordecail, Jean Goulbourne, Jean Binta Breeze and Opal Palmer. I think, indeed, that it is safe to predict that our most significant voices for the next two decades will be female. There are several reasons for this. First: the time demands it. All over the world women have been coming into visibility, and redefining in ways as significant as their male counter-
parts, the fundamental reality of human existence. Caribbean women are part of this universal redefinition, this transformation of reality. Second: the emergence of women writers in the Caribbean indicates that the other half of Caribbean sensibility is seeking fulfilment through self-expression. If the male writers sought their liberation of spirit in the face of rigid colonial structures, the female writers seek theirs in the face of equally rigid patriarchal ones.

The third reason why our next wave of writers may well be women, lies in the contempt for things of the sensibility which our societies have unconsciously bred in the minds of young men. Young men have absorbed a notion of development based on the idea of science and technology, to the exclusion of the Arts. It is quite normal in a class of, say, sixty literature students at UWI, to find only three males. While there is no necessary or inevitable correspondence between studying literature as an academic discipline and becoming a creative writer, it is still true to conclude that over the last fifteen years far more women have been exposed to a wider range of literature than their male counterparts. Given this exposure and the already described need for self-definition, the women will be carrying the major burden of our writing in the near future.

Popular artistic forms such as the Calypso, Reggae and the emerging "Dub" poetry, are still largely dominated by young men. The Calypso, contrary to some opinions, is neither dying nor deteriorating. If there are fewer narrative calypsos, there are more celebratory ones. The Calypso today also contains a range of political recall as well as an analytic grasp of the political moment that is equal to, if not greater than, what obtained in the age of Atilla. It provides us with an index of popular attitudes to an increasingly bewildering social experience, and has had to wrestle with growing problems of madness (Terror's "Madness", 1974), drug addiction (Duke, Sparrow, Explainer, Singing Francine among others have all sung on this theme), unemployment, corruption and vagrancy.

The darkening social experience since Independence has changed the nature of calypso laughter which, in the process of adjusting to bewildering paradox, has become a very complex thing. Chalkdust's "Learn to Laugh" advocates bitter mirth. It disturbs precisely because it unmasks the source of laughter, revealing it as chaos, bitterness and helplessness; as well as its function: masking, evasion and dereliction of the intolerable responsibility for setting the situation right. The language of some calypsos has returned to the singalong simplicity of the old-time kalinda chants, while that of those singers who have accepted a burden of self-definition, has become more metaphorical, more dense, and more capable of expressing a wider range of feeling.

But calypsonians, like most other creative artists, face extreme problems when it comes to having their records produced. The young singer, like the young writer, may find that there is no one who is prepared to invest in an unknown voice. Or an investor may not offer fair terms. Tales of the exploitation of singers can fill a book. Plagiarism for commercial gain has been a major concern. Subtle or overt political
censorship has existed in some Caribbean territories. Such censorship places an additional pressure on the singer, whose revenues are inevitably affected when his songs aren't played on the radio. A paradoxical situation is often created, where one sector of the community blames singers for composing trivial party songs, while another sector damns them for telling too much depressing political truth.

It should be clear, then, that all categories of artists need help of some sort. There is pressing need not only for awards such as the Guyana Prize for Literature, but also for a CARICOM Publishing House, which should belong equally to the public and private sectors in the Caribbean, and which, utilising the infrastructure that already exists in abundance throughout these territories, should publish school books, literary, academic and historical texts, as well as the burgeoning music of the region. There is no reason why, equipped with skilled panels of editorial advisers in each discipline, panels drawn, as CXC panels are, from all over the region, such a CARICOM Publishing House should not be able to select work that has merit and quality; work that is vital to our perception of self and possibility; work, too, that is informed by that critical intelligence which will be necessary for our self-knowledge and our location of the Caribbean self in the world and in the cosmos.

Such a CARICOM Publishing House can become a means whereby we may ingather our wandering wits, or, to use Martin Carter's arresting image: collect our scattered skeleton. No regional cultural policy will emerge without something like it. We need institutions that are more permanent than Carifesta, which, indeed, will give us something to celebrate whenever Carifesta comes around. A CARICOM Publishing House should also serve to stem the annual outflow from the region of millions of dollars, which is what we as a region pay foreign publishing houses, by presenting them with our captive primary and high school markets.

The act of writing poetry, prose or drama is, now that we know the extent to which science and technology are controlled by the metropole, one of the most crucial necessities and possible frontiers for development in the Caribbean. We cannot control the price of oil; we cannot control, try as we may, the price of bauxite; nor can we control the American quota for sugar. But we can control our exploration and presentation of ourselves. The Arts are probably the only area in which sovereignty is possible; though even here the burden of autonomous statement is exacting as frightening a toll as the region-wide collapse of our economies. This is so not only because of the difficulties artists experience in getting their work published, but also because of the difficult conditions in which the average citizens of these territories have been existing for some time.

At times these conditions objectify themselves, crystallize themselves, as it were, into moments of terrible atrocity, that have wrung from the poet and novelist and playwright outcry after outcry. Since Independence, we've had in the Caribbean guerillas and gundowns, the Malik affair in Trinidad with its gruesome lettuce-patch murders of the Trinidadian Skerritt and the Englishwoman, Gail Ann Benson. Guyana
became unwittingly involved in that drama when Malik, who was married to a Guyanese, chose this landscape as the stage for his final act of folly: an attempt to walk from Berbice to Brazil. We all know the literature that grew out of that catastrophe: Vidia Naipaul's lucid essay, "The Killings in Trinidad", and his stark best-selling novel, Guerillas, which became very popular in North America, a country so much engaged in the conversion of fact into fiction, that many people there can no longer distinguish between the two. Trinidad, which is very similar to America in this respect, converted the Malik affair into the Carnival Ole Mas Band, BENSON UNDER HEDGES.

Jamaica has since Independence been conducting its fixed dialectic of gunmen; its unending, fratricidal conflict has concretised itself in acts such as that of gunmen feeding children and mothers to the flames in Orange Lane; old ladies burned to death in Eventide; and, worst of all, the sacrificial waste of the 1980 elections when well over five hundred people were killed. This scenario is being re-enacted in far more gruesome terms in Haiti, to whose assistance Jamaica, pre-schooled in similar atrocity, has self-righteously rushed.

The Jamaican tragedy has given rise to several poems. One has only to read Brathwaite's Kingston poems such as "Spring-blade", "Starvation", "Dread", "Wings of a Dove", "Sun Song" and "Kingston in the Kingdom of this World" to see how this tragedy has affected the expression of one of the region's leading writers. The Orange Lane fire is directly alluded to in his "Poem for Walter Rodney" where he makes the connection between two atrocities, twinning the cities of Kingston and Georgetown. Recognizing in contemporary Jamaica patterns and structures of mind as old as the slave plantation, Brathwaite has shown in some detail how what he calls "the return of the status crow" has produced "the resurrection of the dread". The poems of Denis Scott, Brian Meeks or Kendel Hippolyte, Scott's play Dog, the reggae songs of Marley and the recently murdered Peter Tosh, the Dub poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mutabaruka, Jean Binta Breeze and Mikey Smith, who couldn't believe that children were being deliberately thrown into the Orange Lane fire, but was himself soon to be stoned to death by people who disagreed with his political views:— all provide us with a range of artistic responses to Jamaican atrocity, and define the bleak spiritual landscape out of which many Caribbean writers operate.

One of the duties of the Caribbean State should be to provide the citizen and artist with the necessary space within which he can operate, even when the citizen and artist see through and beyond the structures and devices of the State. Where such space does not exist, literature creates it through protest, or through the imaginative territory which it liberates in quest of living-room for the spirit. The creative voice in the Caribbean has always challenged the political reality or unreality, fostered by ideologues for or against the prevailing political order. When this happens, the creative voice may find itself confronted by the ignorant machinery of an oppression which, when it is not fostered directly by the State, may be tacitly permitted to happen because of the indifference or neglect of the State. The word may then find itself in chains.
Edward Kamau Brathwaite's "Kingston in the Kingdom of this World" dramatises the outcry of the voice against such imprisonment. The poem's voice is simultaneously that of a Christ figure awaiting trial and crucifixion; that of the artist, whose authority of sunlight, vision, music, dance and the illuminating power of the imagination is pitted against the incarceration of the State; and that of the Dogon Nummo, the primal creative word and voice and spirit of Africa, rotting in a Jamaican jail. I'll read this poem now for Mikey Smith, for Walter Rodney, for Martin Carter and for George Lamming, allowing, as you may have noticed, the living and the dead proportional representation.

Kingston in the Kingdom of this World

The wind blows on the hillside
and I suffer the little children
I remember the lilies of the field
and fish swim in their shoals of silence
our flung nets are high wet clouds, drifting

with this reed I make music
with this pen I remember the word
with these lips I can remember the beginning of the world

between these bars is this sudden lock-up
where there is only the darkness of dog-bark
where I cannot make windmills of my hands
where I cannot run down the hill-path of faith
where I cannot suffer the little children

a man may have marched with armies
he may have crossed the Jordan and the red sea
he may have stoned down the walls of Jericho

here where the frogs creak where there is only the croak of starlight
he is reduced
he is reduced
he is reduced
to a bundle of rags
a broken stick
that will never whistle through fingerstops into the music of flutes
that will never fling nets white sails crossing

gospel was a great wind freedom of savannas
gospel was a great mouth telling thunder of heroes
gospel was a cool touch warm with the sunlight like
water in claypots, healing

this reduction wilts the flower
weakens the water
coarsens the lips
fists at the bars, shake rattle and hammers at the locks
suffer the little children
suffer the rose gardens
suffer the dark clouds howling for bread
suffer the dead fish poisoned in the lake

my authority was sunlight: the man who arose from the dead called me saviour
his eyes had known moons older than jupiters
my authority was windmills: choirs singing of the flowers of rivers

your authority is these chains that strangle my wrists
your authority is the red whip that circles my head
your authority is the white eye of interrogator's terror: siren price fix the law of undarkness

the dreadness of the avalanches of unjudgement

it is you who roll down boulders when i say word
it is you who cry wolf when i offer the peace of wood-doves
it is you who offer up the silence of dead leaves

i would call out but the guards do not listen
i would call out but the dew out there on the grass cannot glisten
i would call out but my lost children cannot unshackle their shadows of silver

here i am reduced to this hole of my head
where i cannot cut wood where i cannot eat bread
where i cannot break fish with the multitudes

my authority was foot stamp upon the ground
the curves the palms the dancers
my authority was nyambura: inching closer
embroideries of fingers silver earrings: balancers

and
Guyana has matched the rest of the Caribbean in atrocity. We had the mind-blowing Jim Jones Affair being enacted in the Guyana forest of the night, involving a handful of white masters of the religious word and nine hundred black slaves to it. This atrocity has produced about a dozen prose accounts, including one from Shiva Naipaul who, imitating his elder brother as he usually did, also squeezed a novel out of the catastrophe. There were also two or three American movies, one of which was significantly entitled not an American, but The Guyana Tragedy. Popular response in Guyana was provided by two songs, one by Nicky Porter and the other by the Trade Winds, who summarized the Jim Jones catastrophe with the couplet:

He tell them to think and they thinking
So he tell them to drink and they drinking

What the Caribbean mind can't comprehend, it converts into a macabre carnival of humour, behind which still lurks the cadaver of evaded catastrophe. Here the Trade Winds are, perhaps unconsciously, establishing the link between centralised propaganda, mind-control and self-destruction, and suggesting a lesson pertinent not only to the Jim Jones commune, who were in any case no longer capable of learning it, but to the Guyanese nation as a whole.

Guyana can also boast the death of Walter Rodney which, like the Grenada flasco three years later — (Grenada is already an American movie) — was a devastating body blow to an entire generation; the literal reduction to ashes of passion, energy, commitment, courage, laughter and intelligence. That death has evoked an entire anthology of poems, as well as collections of papers from conferences and seminars on the meaning of the life's work of an outstanding historian, Caribbean and international personality, who could not find a job at the University of Guyana, even when the History Department there was being headed by
an American alcoholic, of whom the kindest thing that one can say is that he was colourless and nondescript. That this could happen under a regime which four years earlier had had the generosity, scope and vision to inaugurate Carifesta, is perhaps the most astounding paradox to have been produced in a country of astounding paradoxes.

Moving as all these elegies to Rodney undoubtedly are, I'd have preferred other poems and Rodney alive. I'd even have preferred him to have rejected what Linton Kwesi Johnson termed "History's weight", and obeyed the advice which Wordsworth McAndrew offered him in a 1976 poem, written in reaction to his being denied the job at U.G. Mc Andrew at that time had already intuited a sort of doom, and advised Rodney to leave a country which could or would not find use for either his academic excellence or political commitment.

Mc Andrew himself, by far Guyana's best and most active folklorist, who almost single-handedly provided a forum for scores of new Guyanese short stories, unearthed the customs, sayings and practices of Guyanese from all corners of the land, took his own advice and left Guyana. The warehouse manager where he first sought work in New Jersey gave him a simple arithmetic test which he clearly expected him to fail. When Mac returned after a few minutes, the manager exclaimed in the mixture of amazement and contempt with which Prospero is sometimes grudgingly forced to acknowledge Caliban as a being capable of intelligence: "Gee! He got them all right!" Our national talent has been to make the real man into a small man. As the voice in "Kingston in the Kingdom of this World" laments: he is reduced. He is reduced.

Tonight, we are celebrating the sponsoring of Literature by State and School. It is worth reminding both State and School of the strain under which writers exist, particularly when they are politically critical of the State. In Trinidad five poets were among the 1970 detainees, and Jack Kelshall, whom Guyanese of the early sixties might well remember, became a poet after he was wrongfully imprisoned in the 1970s. Martin Carter had, of course, experienced this under the British nearly two decades earlier.

Under such stasis, such unchange, some writers have chosen the amnesia of alcohol. Others, like Mittelholzer, Leroy Calliste, Eric Roach, the painter and folklorist Harold Simmons, and the poet and teacher Neville Robinson committed suicide by rope, poison, the knife or fire. It is a dangerous thing, often a fatal thing, to even possess sensibility in such an age, where there are so many ways that a person can be destroyed. We live in societies in the Caribbean where the price of a certain type of clarity is sudden death; where the price of a certain type of commitment is certain arrest; of a certain quality of feeling is possible self-immolation.

The grimness of the age has affected the styles and modes of functioning of both the State and the individual. If many individual sensibilities have succumbed to despair or become fixed in automatic attitudes of protest and resistance, the State has tended to ossify into rigid authoritarian attitudes, which are really the mask of a fundamental impotence.
Surveying West Indian societies since Independence, one is forced to conclude that we remain colonial in how authority reacts to critical challenge; that certain aspects of our consciousness have become paralysed in ancient attitudes of crippledom; that, sadly, it has proven easier to mummify entire nations than the individual corpse.

Our neo-colonial situation of simultaneous freedom and mental enchainment is one of deep and perplexing paradox. In Trinidad last year it was possible for black policemen to unleash an unprovoked attack on black people demonstrating against the anti-black racism of South Africa's apartheid State. The same Trinidad moved a vote in the United Nations to enforce sanctions against South Africa. Faced with such inconsistency, deeply rooted in our colonial past and blossoming daily in our neo-colonial present, the mind of artist and critic alike seeks naturally to express and explore paradox.

I have, consequently, named this address "Trophy and Catastrophe". If the catastrophe refers to these societies in which we now live and breathe and have what remains of our being, the trophy refers to the Guyana Prize for Literature which, Your Excellency, you have with such imagination and generosity inaugurated. I am proud to be identified with this effort and this occasion, and to congratulate the winners in each category. I hope the prize is only the beginning of a new dispensation for writers, and that the graciousness which inspired its inauguration will also inform the political future of the Guyanese people.

Thank You.
GUYANA PRIZE ADDRESS

by WILSON HARRIS

In responding to the award of the 1987 Guyana Prize for Best Book of Fiction for his “Carnival” Wilson Harris gave an address at the ceremony held at the National Cultural Centre on December 8th, 1987. Subsequently he expanded on this address in the form of further comments contributed to Kyk-Over-Al.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen, before I move into my address may I be permitted to coin a phrase from the unpalatable wisdom of the Gods - “Imaginative writers bite the hand that feeds them”. This ancient legend possesses obscure roots but one tends to think it relates to an age when men and women stood in awe of the furies. Art is rooted in creative conscience and the bite of the furies that the mythmaking writer himself endures brings a cutting edge into every serious address he or she makes in the name of imaginative truth.

May I now thank the Judges of the prize committee who have, I am sure, worked conscientiously and thoughtfully in the matter of these awards which are, I believe, the first of their kind in the Caribbean as a whole. This occasion signals and confirms the necessity for a serious examination of issues of creativity and cross-cultural innovation. Edward Kamau Brathwaite has stated in his new book X/SELF that “Caribbean culture has been cruelly neglected both by the Caribbean itself and by the rest of the world”.

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

My gifted colleagues Fred D’Aguiar, Janice Shinebourne and Marc Matthews belong to a later generation, but we share across the generations one prime feature. That feature is an adventure into arts of memory. Apart from the obvious application of the theme of remembered places, persons, etc., there is a tremendous momentum and value in arts of memory seen from another standpoint. Such arts are closely linked to a force of tradition that has been virtually eclipsed for centuries in Guyana and the Americas. And the paradox is that communities such as Guyana and the Caribbean may, if they understand themselves profoundly, play a significant part in the revival of such lost traditions.

A brief word about this. Arts of memory are peculiarly associated with grotesque imageries. The grotesque in this context signifies a bizarre, even unprepossessing, constellation that nature sometimes wears through which however a door opens, so to speak, into concentrated processes of creativity and beauty and ecstasy at the heart of being.

Take the anancy/spider grotesquerie. I do not need to dwell on
its bearing nor the nature of the trickster, on the one hand, the saviour on the other. Then there is Quetzalcoatl of ancient Mexico whose Guyanese cousin is the eternal child of the bone-flute, Yurokon.

Quetzalcoatl signifies an evolutionary metaphysic in the marriage of the fabulous bird (quetzal) and the legendary snake (Coatl).

Quetzalcoatl assists us now in modern times from the shadowy workshop of the Gods that he still inhabits to penetrate one of the most formidable of European myths - that of FAUST - and to re-interpret it, bring a new density into it, from an original and partly non-European position.

It is only recently that European scholars began to revive the bearing that the grotesque image possesses in arts of memory upon the greatest of European writers Dante and Shakespeare.

The enigma of such tradition is its deepseated application to a universal humanity in all extremity, all disabilities of nature through which the spirit of creative moment still triumphs. The emphasis in such tradition upon the grotesque that we find in medieval books was not a cult of despair (as was once thought to be the case) but a classical memory procedure through which a reader was energised to identify with layers of meaning beyond a particular boundary of sensation.

All this bears on the Third World, on its potential for awakening into a new literacy of the imagination.

The great predicament, the economic sorrows, the destitution of the Third World, obsesses the mass-media press today in Europe and the United States. That press makes no bones about the grotesqueries of fate in many societies.

Should not all this energise us to place renewed emphasis on cultural, philosophic, environmental thresholds into arts of memory?

Guyana sometimes appears as a marginal society to the Caribbean and in South America. But it is here - in such apparently marginal societies around the globe - that supreme importance attaches to creative conscience, to the freedom of the person, to the conduct of politics, the conduct of democracy, to innovation, to arts of the imagination.

For all these bear on the value of survival, and on the most important and troubling questions that plague our divided and ghetto-fixed civilisation. What has marginal being to offer the world at the heart of extremity, not heart of darkness, but heart of extremity?

What is true value? What is true spirit?

Such questions are of intense and burning moment. Because they arise most telling within apparently marginal communities they raise a momentous paradox. T.S. Eliot has implicitly expressed a hope for the revival of allegory. I think he had European writers in mind.

But such revival - as an art of memory - may be more relevant to societies living on edge, so to speak, and which need to plumb resources of inner confidence in addressing the difficult problems they face. Modern allegory revives in new ways the inner guide; it stresses how real are our intuitive powers to interrogate the building blocks of a civilisation and to breach or cleave a perverse addiction to authoritarianism in Third World regimes or to authoritarian realism in narrative fiction.
Men have walked on the moon. The extraordinary swaddling clothes they wore like clowns bouncing in a circus have become little more than hollow puppetry to the computerised and insensible body of an age. And yet seen with another eye by suffering Mankind they bring home the marginality of a stellar universe by which we are all fascinated. In such marginality we dream of new centres of selfknowledge rooted in the densities of space and time. A rich parable for men and women who have long been subject to the traumas of the conditioned mind, the colonised mind, the obsessive colonising mind. How to transform such traumas into cross-cultural innovation is an issue that must loom, I feel, with greater and greater pertinence and urgency as we move towards the 21st century.

The difficulties that encompass this country are many and serious but the fabric of these difficulties possesses varying and troubling dimensions throughout the modern world. These difficulties may be disguised or hidden from view in prosperous societies. In essence they are difficulties to do with an age in profoundest transition.

Guyana has deep roots in many cultures. This could be its greatest memory resource, strength and hope.

**GROTESQUE IMAGERIES AND INTUITIVE POWERS**

I feel I may best expand on issues I raised in my acceptance speech at the National Cultural Centre on December 8, 1987, by commenting on two elements in the address.

The first relates to "grotesque imageries" and their bearing on the recovery of apparently lost traditions and arts of memory.

Frances Yates, an outstanding English scholar, has written with illumination in this area though confessing to the major difficulties involved in salvaging an art of memory so long in eclipse.

In brief the grotesque image is a kind of short-hand that energises a society to recall and act upon a corridor of associations in a body of imaginative work. Thus in Shakespearean theatre in the sixteenth century memory images of a very peculiar nature were part and parcel of the equipment of poet, playwright, actor and audience. Through such impetus and momentum there came into play a diversity of connection with the distant past even as that diversity came peculiarly and paradoxically alive in the original mind of the present.

All this enriches I believe the authenticity of the collective unconscious of which C.G. Jung wrote.

The contours of imagination one may trace in what I have just been saying are native I feel to the Caribbean and to Central and South America. I referred to Anancy and to Quetzalcoatl in my address. Anancy is a spider-grotesque that energises the imagination to map hidden or frail interrelationships in nature even as it points through the Middle Passage into Africa. It embraces new American content in explicating the body of the trickster, on one hand, the subtleties and trials of the saviour on the other.
Quetzalcoatl assists us to break a narrow confine or boundary situation. It is a metaphysic of evolution with roots that lie deep in buried cultures. Walter Roth has pointed to a bridge of associations (which I sought to explore imaginatively in my critical book *The Womb of Space* published by Greenwood Press, USA) linking Quetzalcoatl, Kukulcan, Huracan (hurricane) and Yurokon (the Guyanese child of the bone-flute). Yurokon therefore belongs to the family of Quetzalcoatl and may even, who knows, be antecedent to Quetzalcoatl in the workshop of the gods and the obscurity of Carib blood. One sees in all these connections — as one turns them into multi-faceted approaches to the mystery of psyche — complex and subtle links between music and theatre, art and language, nature and culture.

In the same way one may explore the Indian goddess Kali. Kali you may remember is a goddess from whom many arms and hands sprout in a most disconcerting manner.

There are notable uses of the Anancy theme in Caribbean writers such as Salkey, Mais, Selvon, Jean Rhys, Brathwaite, Carew. Major examples in North American literature are Melville’s *The Confidence Man* and Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* in which Rhinehart is a sinister equivalent of Anancy.

The grotesque image therefore is a paradoxical formation that unlocks the strangest capacity for ecstasy and beauty born of evolutions of the unconscious into a new consciousness even as it unfolds caveats or warnings of the manipulated personality who alas may become the manipulator of others.

May I now turn to the other element of which I spoke in my address, namely, intuitive powers. This is a far-reaching issue that I may best illumine through a talk given at the Commonwealth Institute, London, in the autumn of 1986.

**Validation of Fiction: a Personal View of Imaginative Truth**

The world in which we live sometimes appears to border upon a theatre of demonic comedy, and to reveal a tissue of absurdities, not to speak of disinformation, if I may quote the current jargon. But when one looks deep into the fabric of creation one may discern there, I think, the outlines of genuine hope, however apparently frail. Deeply nourished one may be by a vision of consciousness, a vision of hope, but it is clear that complacency would be gross folly. There is no short cut to solutions of famine, to the pollution of the globe, to authoritarianism and rigged elections in the so-called third world, to nuclear peril, to violence, to drug addiction, etc. Yet creative solutions do exist, and such solutions hinge, I believe, in significant part on a profound literacy of the imagination. I shall define, as this address proceeds, what I mean by literacy of the imagination. First, however, before touching on such a complex conception we need to take account of standard or common-or-garden literacy and illiteracy. Surely the disturbing scenario of illiteracy in many societies around the globe must engage the conscience of writers everywhere. No conference devoted to literature can ignore this. In the
Times Higher Educational Supplement I came across a brief summary of a report published in the United States recently:

Virtually every young American adult can sign his or her name and nearly 95% can read at a level normally expected of 8-year-olds.

That is the good news. This places America at the head of the world’s literacy league table, the report says. But there is also bad news. The National Assessment of Educational Progress which produced the report after testing 3,600 adults between the ages of 21 and 25 found that, although about 95% could read a simple newspaper article, fewer than 40% understood it. Just 20% could use a bus timetable to get from one place to another. Only 38% could work out the cost of a meal by reading the menu and 43% had trouble following directions on a map. When asked to interpret a 4-line poem by Emily Dickinson fewer than the 10% could do so.

Now as you know, poets such as Derek Walcott and the Negritude poet Cesaire are far more difficult than Emily Dickinson! The report, which cost $2 million, predicts that the illiteracy rate will rise during the next decade unless action is taken to help the growing minority populations. Among Blacks who took part in the survey just 10% could understand a newspaper article, 2% could interpret a bus schedule and even fewer were able to utilize unit pricing in a supermarket. Hispanics did a little better but still scored lower than whites. So, that is the situation that affects our society and it would seem to me to be bad news for democracy.

Now, in my judgment illiteracy and semi-literacy possess paradoxes we need to explore. We need to approach the matter from many angles to stimulate a breakthrough from habit or function that may chain an individual into passive acceptance of his role or function. This is a matter which addressed me intimately in the Guyanas when I used to travel along the coasts and when I led engineering and surveying expeditions into the interior. There were occasions when one would have a crew of about 25 or 30 and many of those could just manage to write their names on the pay sheet. Some could read an article in a newspaper. Now I knew those men extremely well and we had a good relationship. I grew over the years to understand their problems and their potentialities. They performed admirably and intelligently within their specific function but appeared lacking in curiosity about the cosmos (if I may so put it) in which they dwelt, the complex rainforest, the river, the night sky that seemed intimate and close in the black dark of a landscape unlit by electricity. It wasn't that they didn't respond to all this but I felt such response — had they confessed to it — would have been a measure of weakness. I was reminded of people who fear their dreams and therefore say they never dream.

They were defined on my paysheet as chainmen, staffmen, bushmen, boatmen, woodmen, axemen, etc. (and that in a way was an eloquent testimony to the ways in which they were psychologically bound or chained).

It happened that one of the crew came into my camp and saw an
anthology of English and American poetry. He opened it and read, by chance, it seemed:

Tyger tyger burning bright
In the forests of the night

He found this incomprehensible and commented ‘tigers do not burn.’ We had seen leopards and tigers in the forest. Furthermore he did not understand what ‘forests of the night’ could mean. My first impulse was to tell him that it was a difficult poem and perhaps he should leave it alone. And then I was struck by an illustration that I felt might help him to relate to Blake’s imagery. I had with me a book on pre-columbian art and I turned to the ancient calendar which as you know was completed just before the conquest of ancient Mexico. I explained to him that it was a calendar that should be read in conjunction with certain codices or signals that bear on astronomy, legend, astrology, etc. And then I said to him suddenly ‘those lines could have been written by a Mexican poet’. He replied ‘how could that be? Did you not say that Blake was an English poet?’ I explained that the codices to which I had referred place unusual emphasis on the tiger-imagery and that such imagery was a major element in the calendar. I explained that the Aztecs believed that the cosmos was governed by certain leaping tigers or jaguars — these were suns, curious suns — and that vast aeons of time would move or give way to new dimensions with the appearance of a new sun or tiger. This was a rough, perhaps crude way of explaining a remarkable myth but it helped to throw a new light, as it were, into Blake’s lines. I went on to suggest that if he looked around into the sky and the river and the rainforest and the interwoven tapestry of the landscape he would gain a threshold into the meaning of ‘forests of the night.’ For that tapestry enhanced the constellations, the stars which came so close to the tops of the trees at night above the clearing we had cut in the forest.

We were camped not far above a waterfall. Take a stroll and look into the waterfall. You will see the lights streaking through, striped reflections like a tiger leaping through. And remember that the tiger is one of the most ancient myths and symbols of the South Americas. The tiger is also a kind of drum I would say. The stripes upon it can be related to the drum of genesis from which a certain music erupts. All this bears upon a cross-cultural dialogue in Blake’s lines with ancient Mexico and South America. Blake would have been unconscious of this but here one perceives the mystery of the universal imagination as it discloses itself in all sorts of cross-cultural connections and tapestries.’

I had no idea what bearing this would have on his perception of things but in subsequent conversations it became clear to me that he had begun to look at the world around him in a re-visionary way and that the concept about which I had spoken had done much to loosen the frame in which he was confined as though that frame were ordained by fate or history.

So it was that I came to perceive the matter of illiteracy and semi-literacy in a new and startling light that was to address me years later in
re-visionary strategies I employed in writing fiction.

Obviously there were ways to deal with illiteracy that invest in the mechanics of the alphabet. But one wonders do such teaching mechanics genuinely breach the psychology of illiteracy that has its roots in the hierarchy of functions and a subconscious alliance with that hierarchy through frames or roles determined by the rigidity of cultures?

The universal imagination - if it has any value or meaning - has its roots in subconscious and unconscious strata that disclose themselves profoundly within re-visionary strategies through intuitive clues that appear in a text one creates. That text moves or works in concert with other texts to create a multi-textual dialogue. Let me seek to illustrate what I mean through Carnival, one of my recent fictions. There were two epigraphs to Carnival. One is from Dante, The Divine Comedy — the translation is by Laurence Binyon. I'll read that epigraph:

Here all misgivings must thy mind reject,
Here cowardice must die and be no more.
We are come to the place I told thee to expect.

His hand on mine, to uphold my falterings,
He led me on into the secret things.

Now that epigraph was deliberately chosen. On the other hand there's an epigraph from Norman O. Brown's book Love's Body. I had completed Carnival when I started reading this book, sort of glancing through it, and came upon a passage which startled me because it appeared to validate the imagination-strategy I pursued in Carnival. I use the word 'validate' to imply proof as well. I am suggesting that imaginative fiction may be proven or validated. This is not a dogmatic assertion. It is a personal view, it is something I discovered. It seems to me that the imaginative writer — especially when he diverges from conventional realism — may find his or her strategy validated by live fossils in the soil of tradition of which he may know nothing at all. Such live fossils or archetypal myth break into the narrative on which he is working, take on a different form as if a subtle evolution is occurring in unconscious strata of memory that erupt into the conscious mind. One can see the outline of the ancient, live fossil-myth but it is charged with different edges, different implications, different complications. One revises one's drafts by scanning these closely. One comes upon what I tend to call 'intuitive clues' which appear to have been planted by another hand. It is as if a daemon navigates within the imageries in the text. And that navigation assumes startling force. You look at these intuitive clues and then you revise through them - you concentrate with all the energy at your command on the draft as if it is alive, a living text. I would imagine this strategy was known to the ancient Greeks and indeed to the ancient Arawaks of South America. The ancient Greeks believed that their sculptures would come alive as they sculpted. As they broke into marble or stone or whatever materials with which they worked they saw outlines and features planted, it would seem, by another hand - a hand that arose
from unconscious or subconscious selves or self. In that way the sculpture spoke to them. And they revised, changed, altered, drew different complications into the work as it came alive. The ancient Arawaks likewise sculpted the cherry tree and it came alive. The same principle I would imagine operated. Thus cultures far removed in time and space were involved in a cross-cultural loom or medium of creativity.

May I return to the very first line of the epigraph drawn from Love’s Body:

The wanderings of the soul after death are pre-natal adventures, a journey by water in a ship which is itself a goddess, to the gates of rebirth.

I was instantly struck because I recognized an important strand in the strategy here which had been running through the novel, but which one needed to read as one consulted all the images in the canvas of the novel, to see how one image played back on another so that you began to see the strategy appearing as if it is a subtle complex evolution of the validating myth. It is not a static design, it is a constantly moving shifting design, the outlines are there, changing. One can recognise, as it were, one’s dialogue with an ancient world of which one knew nothing but which lay buried in the unconscious. Let us remember that Caribbean literature (which is a new literature but which has its paradoxical roots in ancient legacies, in ancient Europe, in ancient Africa, ancient India, and above all in the ancient world of the Americas, the pre-Columbian world) possesses strata in a universal unconscious.

Anyway, let us look at that line again:

The wanderings of the soul after death are pre-natal adventures, a journey by water in a ship which is itself a goddess, to the gates of rebirth.

Let us take one of the first indications of that strategy. It appears in Carnival when Masters runs into his house. Masters is the Dantesque guide. He has died but returns to guide Jonathan Weyl, the major character. Masters comes from the grave to unveil his childhood to Jonathan Weyl. He tells Jonathan something about his adventures on the sea shore and how he ran into the house, ran away from a sinister figure. He arrives in the house - he is in the house now:

His trapped sobbing breath had ceased and he moved gingerly (as he had crawled gingerly like a king crab on the foreshore) toward his parents’ room. The door was very slightly ajar. He was about to rap or push when he glimpsed something through the slit of space. It was his mother’s tears that he saw, tears that masked her and suddenly made her into the mother of a god in the play of Carnival. She was sitting at a mirror and her tears were reflected in the glass. (Carnival, Faber and Faber, London, 1985 - p.26)

So there you get your first clue to do with the mother of a god. The passage I have read speaks of a goddess. So you have your first intimations of a mother of a god. The passage goes on:

She did not turn. He did not disclose he was there. He felt
nevertheless that she knew; he felt as she touched her
glass breasts in the mirror that she knew he was inside
her, halfway between a wall of glass and a cavity of flesh,
that she knew he was looking through her into a kind of
fire that mingled with her tears. (p.27)

Now there you have this strange encounter or implicit dialogue
between Masters and the foetus in the womb. He sees himself as a foetus
in a womb. You get your pre-natal adventure, your pre-natal text of
which the epigraph speaks. May I remind you “The wanderings of the soul
after death are pre-natal adventures...

You have your pre-natal text, you have the wanderings of the soul,
the dead Masters who comes back. One is now immersed in the intuitive
imagination at a certain depth. In a way you can see that Dante, when
he chose his guides, did not do so arbitrarily. We are aware now that we
know very little about the traditions which informed Dante and
Shakespeare. Frances Yates has made an effort to salvage those
traditions. But what I seem to learn is that Dante’s guides are intuitive,
real, guides who came up out of his unconscious, subconscious; spoke
to him and therefore linked him to the past. What I am saying here is that
one is now involved in a situation in which the guide, who is substantial
to the fiction and appears to help in the revision as one concentrates very
deeply on what one is doing, begins to unveil a series of adventures, so
to speak, such as I have been describing within a re-visionary strategy.
That re-visionary strategy breaks the uniform mould of realism. No
realist document would speak of conversing with the foetus in the womb.
Thus the realist text is broken and it is as if you have entered a realm of
multiple texts.

There is another text secreted elsewhere which addresses one, a
text one tends to eclipse. Now, one must remember that many of those
men I spoke of, the men with whom I travelled in the interior, lived in a
world where so many things had been eclipsed, so many things lost. Even
though they worked in the forest they know very little about the people
who had passed this way. Now let us resume our analysis of the passage
I read. We have the flesh and the glass. The passage speaks of glass
breasts in the mirror, of a wall of glass and cavity of flesh. That is an
important clue which will assist us in the next quotation from Carnival:

Queen Jennifer stepped out of a shower, out of a waterfall,
out of the ocean, into the bedroom. I was lying half-asleep,
half awake on her bed. She handcuffed me to her body as
to the mast of a ship. (p.95)

Now, look back at the epigraph - a journey by water in a ship
which is itself a goddess. So ‘she handcuffs me to her body as to the mast
of a ship.’ So we have another element coming in, in which you can see
the design of the ancient myth though with different edges and compli-
cations.

The third quotation that I would like to glance at is the following:

The storm hit the vessel at last. The glass sides of the ship
darkened.

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Now note that 'glass' comes in here. We have seen the glass earlier, the glass breasts in the mirror, the cavity of flesh and the glass:

The glass sides of the ship darkened and it was as if I saw it now, I saw the sea, in Masters' eyes. [Masters is the guide, the dead guide] The sea was black and white fire ran along the ridges and valleys of space. I held to my dream-support for bleak life and yet this was my leap into Purgatory all over again, purgation through the terror of beauty. (p.91)

So there we have our ship. What is astonishing is that in revising the work with complex concentration, in sensing the force of the intuitive guide, one begins to elaborate a strategy, which, if you read the novel carefully, one would see, in the very first line of the epigraph from Love's Body. But it appears, as I said, in a subtle evolved form. It has different edges, different complications, different values. Nevertheless you can see the outlines there. So that the force of the thing makes it seem that one is in dialogue with the past and yet one has an original voice. One is sustained by the past and yet one has an original voice. One is in dialogue with something very ancient, and yet one has an original voice.

Now the last part of the epigraph from Love's Body 'the gates of rebirth'. That comes at the very end of the novel in which I actually quote a line from The Divine Comedy, but I'll just read the last part:

"Whether she is Masters' child or not", said Amaryllis, taking my hand with one of hers and holding the child to her breast with the other, "she runs in parallel with all wasted lives to be redeemed in time. And in that spirit she is his child. She is our child. We killed our parents, remember, in Carnival logic even as they, besieged by fear, fear of a blasted future, were tempted to destroy us. And now in mutual heart, mutual uncertainty across generations, across seas and spaces, as to who is divine parent, who human child, who will parent the future, who inherit the future, we surrender ourselves to each other. The love that moves the sun and the other stars [This is the Dante line, so there is another text inserted there deliberately, but yet coming in as part of the multiple texts, the multi-textual fiction] The love that moves the sun and the other stars moves us now, my dearest husband, my dearest Jonathan, to respond with originality to each other's Carnival seas of innocence and guilt, each other's Carnival skies of blindness and vision". (pp.171-172)

And there you have the implicit gateway into rebirth. This is not the first time I have discovered - I discovered it in The Guyana Quartet but long after the novels were published - a validating or proving premise. In Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness I discovered it there too but after this novel had been submitted and virtually published. Carnival was the closest I came to arriving almost immediately upon a validating myth and I was able to use that epigraph from Love's Body. The point I am making is that revision is a much more complex matter than people
think. Revision is not just correcting the grammar or the syntax. It’s a matter of coming into attunement with a profound concept of creativity rooted in live fossil and archetypal myth. It has to do with the way one scans the draft, picks up elements in the draft, of which one is unconscious, unconscious of planting them there. I have discussed this with students in the United States in my creative writing classes. That is how I drew them into revising their work. And students are sometimes dumbfounded when I say “But look, you’ve put that there. There it is. Now what can you make of it? Look at it, and let’s see if you can revise through it.” And as the student revises, as the writer revises, an unpredictable strategy begins to appear. It calls for immense concentrations because one is running against the grain of one’s time, which is authoritarian realism. Or if not that, some kind of nihilism, or if not that, carefully calculated things to do with sex and violence, etc. One is really immersed in a strategy in which one pays the closest attention to the language of the buried imagination erupting into consciousness. You listen to the radio or the newspapers and there are people all the time saying: “Oh we’re looking for a form of words which will allow x and y to come together” and the form of words is always dismissed as some kind of irrelevance. But language is world. It may be that one may never discover how a strategy one pursues can be proven or validated because one may never come upon the validating premise. And critics rarely approach imaginative work in this way. Yet my hopes remain profound and rich because I believe when fiction can be proven or validated by live myth, living fossil-strata, the confidence of the humanities must rest on something other than fashion or some other complacent ideology.

Unless a society is prepared to revise complexly the various levels on which it exists, to move with depth and to see that the creative arts are a profound phenomenon and as important as science and that we need very careful concentration on the issues of the imagination - (we don’t want pundits on the television who discuss a novel as if it is junk food) - then illiteracies of the imagination will become endemic, virtually incurable. But I cannot believe that a best-seller age, a mass-media age, is destined to eclipse creativity as a meaningful paradox born of age-old truths and the spirit of innovation and originality.
OL'HIGUE
HAMLET, PRINCE OF DARKNESS
('What, hath this thing appeared again?')

By night
in this enchanted wood
a jewelled toad comes down to drink
its own reflection
in the stream.
Bubbled eyes, tender as love, reflect
the curvature of earth,
the moon’s bright beam.
Its squat, humped body settles on a rock
to dream.

By day
the wattled toad becomes
a thing of dread:
its slimy back and mottled head
are odious, obscene.
The princess hurries from her bed
to wake the sleeping queen.

"Alas! To know what I know!
To see what I have seen!"

WOODBINE

In those slow burning days
quietude held passion.
Flambouyantes, brooding in heat
hung out red parasols, dropping cool shadows
on back and head. Sunlight splintered East Street canal. Noiseless
we lay, bent pin-hooks baited with bread,
angling for sun-fish.
A lizard, noosed in grass, threshing itself to death,
was common play.
Boys will be boys.

But there was that insistent thing
in our flesh that tore
when we ran in the night
dizzy with freedom; that made us gorge
green mangoes, starapples, sweet bursting sapodillas,
taught us to store pleasure
without thought of price.
At Mrs Cash-tinhelro's we mixed mauby and compress dark syrup marbling the ice. Remember Mary-bruk-iron, legendary whore, empress of vice? Where now is Lengery, that towering skeleton whom we would jeer? And there was plump and married Oona who gave our Big John his first sweet taste, I think, of sin, to our vicarious delight and fear. Innocence, always precarious in those days, vanished that night.

Children at play,
We pulled life by the root every new day.
Old Baije, mute, vengeful woodsman could scare us away from the great Tamarind tree, but not from knowledge of its sweet and sour fruit.

JANE KING HIPPOLYTE

INTERCITY DUB FOR JEAN

Brixton groans — From the horror of the hard weight Of history Where the whites flagellate in their ancestry And the blacks hold the stone And they press it to their hearts And London is a hell in many many parts. But your voice rings true From the edge of hell Cause the music is the love And you sing it so well.

And I travel through the country On the inter-city train And the weather may be bad But the sperm of the rain Wriggles hope, scribbles hope Cross the windows of the train And the autumn countryside
Has a green life still
And the rain-sperm says
It will come again, it will
It will come, it will come
It will come again
New rich life from the bitter
And dark and driving rain —
And you run like water
Over Brixton soil
Writing hope on the windows
Bringing light through the walls
Like the water you connect
With the light above
Like the water writing making
The green life swell
Cause the music is the love
And you sing it so well.

Now I cannot give to you
What you gave to me
But one small part
Of your bravery
Makes me stand up to say
That I want to make them see
That you showed me the way
That the way is me
Like the way is you
And the way is we.
   And the love is in the water
In the wells pooled below
And the love is in the light
And the cold cold snow
And the rain lances down
From the light to the well
And it points to heaven
And it points to hell
And the love is real
Make the music swell
Cause the music is the love
And you sing it so well.

There's a factory blowing smoke-rings
Cross the railway line
You know it took me time to learn
That this country wasn't mine
And I want to go back home
To swim in the sunset bay
Feel the water and the light
Soft-linking night and day
Like the music makes a bridge —
   But there's joy here too
And I might not have seen it
If I hadn't heard you.
And I hope now I'll be writing
This poem all my life
For the black city world
Where the word is a knife
That cuts through the love
And divides up the life.
   For you saved me from a trap
Just before I fell
Cause the music is the love
And you sing it so well.

The Brixton-battered sisters
Hissed their bitterness and hate
With their black man the oppressor
And death the white race fate
And they don't want to build
No bridge no gate —
   And I nearly turned away
In pain and rage and fear
Till I heard your voice
Ringing clarion-clear
And you burst like a flower
From the sad sad soil
And you blew like a breeze
Round the shut-tight hall
And you danced like a leaf
And you sang like a bell —
   You said Music reaches heaven
And music changes hell
Cause the music is the love
And you sing it so well.
I was about to retire for the night at my dwelling place at the South Street side of the Supreme Court building when Bullet started barking madly at something moving in the rain towards us. It turned out to be Naomi and her shivering puppy.

They were soaked to the skin, and while Naomi wasn't shivering, she was visibly uncomfortable. I hushed Bullet, then rummaged up from my plastic onion bag an old shirt which I handed to Naomi. She relieved herself of the bundle she had slung on her shoulder and accepted the shirt. In a while she was dry, but for the dress she wore.

"T ank yuh fo' leh me change, mistuh," she said. I straightened up the box-boards that constituted a make-shift room for me on that cold pavement and discreetly turned away for her to change into dry clothing.

Bullet was compassionately licking Naomi's puppy's mangy skin, apparently to provide warmth from his tongue.

I did not object. Bullet had also suffered from mange when I discovered him by the Stabroek Market wharf a year ago.

Naomi finished dressing and wrung the rain-water from her dress. I advised her to spread it out on one of my box-board walls.

Naomi spent the night with me, during which she rested her head on a tattered Bible wrapped in cellophane.

She awoke next morning as I was feeding our two pets some pieces of tennis-rolls I had managed to gather from the waste drums in Stabroek Market the previous day.

"Yuh is de bes' gentleman of dese streets, mistuh. Yuh offer me lodging pon yuh small bedding while you yuhself sit an' brace pon cold walls content as ever. Yuh ent even try fo' intafer wid me, like some hooligans does do. Yuh is really a Good Samaritan. God bless yuh, mistuh."

When we had finished packing our belongings in our respective bundles, we trudged to the old wharf at the head of Robb Street to cook our breakfast, as I do every morning and evening.

We were early, for none of my companions who also lived on the streets elsewhere was there, as is customary. I put the two claybricks in place, so that they sandwiched the firewood I had saved up nearby. Having lit the fire, I then proceeded to place my butter can of water on the claybricks when I spotted Roland approaching us with fish in his hands.

Roland is a strange person. Long before the advent of our local Rastas, Roland has been sporting heavy dread-locks on his head. And Roland gads about Georgetown all day long with his pants front open so that his private parts are always exposed to the public view. Sometimes you would see Roland's face painted with coats of chalk-dust as he moves proudly about.

But Roland is helpful and generous, and wears a permanent smile; his face never expresses any negative emotions.

So we fried Roland's fish, using some lard Naomi offered us from
a Nescafe bottle. That, coupled with boiled plantains and bush tea, comprised our breakfast.

"Mistuh, ah goin' by Bourda Mall fo' pass me time today aftah ah beg me day's livin'. Leh we meet dere dis mid-day, nuh? I does need some sens'ble company fo' gaf wid."

I felt honoured on hearing this from Naomi, and promised to meet her again. Roland, Naomi and myself then went our separate ways to earn our day's keep.

That day at Bourda Mall turned out to be one of the best days of my life. Sitting in the shade on a concrete bench and mercifully fanned by a cool breeze, Naomi again called me a gentleman. After learning that my full name was Benjamin Horatio Nelson, she asked me where I learned to speak proper English.

Tears dripped down my face when I told her how I was once a Language Master at one of Georgetown's top high schools in the days of my youth; how I was jilted by a beautiful switch-board operator at the Telephone Exchange, then situated adjacent Donkey City; how I gravely suffered a nervous breakdown as a result and lost my job; how I never got another job and was neglected by my parents; and how I was introduced to street life by Matthews.

Naomi knew Matthews. After all, who would fail to notice the short, bearded character in his ever-present suit and pants with pockets bulging with papers of all sorts? Matthews is still going strong. I am indebted to him for many things. He is well-educated also, and spends almost all day reading newspapers at the National Library.

Whenever we meet, he starts recounting all the events he thinks I should know about, having read not only our local newspapers, but also such foreign ones as the Trinidad Guardian and Barbados Advocate. Now and then he would pull out from his pocket a dog-eared copy of TIME or NEWSWEEK, donated to him by a lawyer whose office he frequents in Croal Street. He attributes his gratitude to the same lawyer for the suits, ties, trousers and shoes he usually wears.

Matthews literally lives on reading; food is his least concern, and this explains why he is seldom seen begging as we do. "Dat man really gat stamina," Naomi remarked. "He not only a book worm, but a book god."

Naomi was right. Matthews would explain to you world affairs with such ease that even a seasoned politician would be amazed. Besides, there isn't a subject under the sun that Matthews doesn't know something about. You feel very enlightened when he talks to you, and it would be uncultured not to invite him for a morsel at meal time. Matthews is my best friend, and as I recalled my past life for Naomi's benefit that day, she started crying.

"Yuh lucky God send yuh a bes' frien'. For donkey years is me an God alone bin treading dese sinful streets. Not a soul to comfort me with sweet words but dis Bible in me bundle. Jonathan only come in me life de other day," she lamented as she tenderly caressed her mangy puppy.

I immediately proposed to Naomi that we live together, since contrary to her thinking, I was very lonely also. I told her how much I
admired a religious woman like herself, and that our lives might be happy once we shed our loneliness and shared our responsibility for soliciting our daily bread.

I wiped Naomi's tears away with my shirt tail, and she looked squarely into my eyes and said, "De Lord don't come, but he does send."

Naomi and I decided that it would not be convenient to sleep beside the Supreme Court building anymore, for reasons of privacy, and she suggested the G.P.O. building pavement instead. I objected, on the grounds that Sajiwan resided there, and he would be a nuisance to us. Sajiwan is addicted to methylated spirit, and everytime he drinks he picks a quarrel with anyone nearby.

She agreed, and we settled tentatively for a bushy vacant lot at the corner of Regent and Alexander Streets.

With indescribable enthusiasm we related our good fortune to Roland, Matthews, Senseh and Saywack that evening when we assembled at the wharf for our dinner of metagee, prepared by Naomi.

Everyone applauded, and agreed to the proposition that Naomi continue to cook every day. "She gat a nice han'. Ah bite me tongue eatin' dis metagee, man." Senseh remarked. Roland gave an approving smile. Matthews shoved his hands into his bulky pockets and shook his head professorially. Saywack pointed out that the occasion called for celebration. Again, everyone agreed, and promised to buy the best with his day's collection.

The next morning, Naomi and I woke up very early, and, after bathing at the stand-pipe near the Fire Station, proceeded to the wharf, where she made me read no less than five psalms. I hadn't prayed since Noah was a boy. Now, Naomi cajoled me to practise praying.

Evening came, and when Naomi and I arrived at the wharf, Senseh and Saywack greeted us and motioned us to a bench which they had 'borrowed' from Vendors Arcade and then decorated. A massive slice of beef, wrapped in eddoe leaves, lay on the ground nearby.

Matthews and Roland arrived shortly, flaunting a sizeable piece of cardboard, and brimming with smiles. Then Matthews, Santa Claus-like, pulled out a brand-new silver ring from his pocket.

"Whew alyuh t'ief dat?" Senseh demanded.

"It's like this," explained Matthews, "we demonstrated all over this city today, and with the funds we collected, we bought this humble wedding ring."

"Demonstrate wid what?" shouted Saywack.

Roland confidently turned around the cardboard, on which was boldly written:

BAN POVERTY
MAKE US RICH!
VISIT I

Here away from the city
I see no houses.
For miles man and
Nature fuse irrevocably.
Freckles bleat on rice-fields
Turned pasture.
Dots moo and nibble grass
Prick-pin-white Egrets
Service cows and glean
Plowed fields for specks
Of food, or wisdom or love...
Down, around, searching I see no time —
Nothing — except endless webs
Of love whistling through ages gone/Ungo n e.

VISIT II

Nothing and everthing
Rises from Dharti Mata.
Riding this tractor through trails
Bordered by black-sage, a combine
Gathers golden rice and is lost in motion.
Hardee plumed birds dive through limbs
Of splashed green, (Glad for rare human presence)
Flirting melodies louder than this tractor's throb.
A flock of gaulings silently wheel
Into the air ahead — a magic arc —
Lead the path and swerve smoothly Eastward.
Everywhere Krishn's Flute sings in my ear but it is
Radha who chases this tractor, swallows it
From every side and allows its passage on your hair.

VISIT III

Dusk, my love, gathers your skirt
Around my eyes
And what a blessed vision
Assails my sight.
Dark clouds flaying the westward sky
Are dotted red —
The Sindhoor in your head.
Drakes come home to roost
Dipping from the sky.
Gliding unto the soft surface
Of the pond —
Mating with moisture.
Gentle ripples tug my crying toes
O come, O come, my love!

VISIT IV

They stand in clustered solitude
Honey-smooth-brown,
Clean-black-spotted-white,
Coffee creamed, smooth.
A flicker of tail at irritant flies.
A stamp of feet
A chew of cud
Above all a motionlessness;
Meditation on the sky and beyond —
The mysteries of loving.
I feel them look down, deep into themselves.
I see no beef nor mutton or meat.
I see us, our soul, our love holding fast to
The settling dusk on this delicious land.

VISIT V (SURUJ PURAN)

You slippered on the morning air,
And there was a flicker of sunbeams.
I searched and could not see
I felt and could not feel
Your eyes on mine and you in me.
The Pandit expounded —
The lady lost her pin
In lightless house
Went outside in brilliant
Moonlight to find it
Brought me down
Into my dark self
I delved
And found the wisp of your smile — EVERYWHERE
PLUS

The plus eludes you: synchronic thread from thing to thing, as grains associate in sand as waters run to rivers, seas, as man is bound in love to man so am I bondaged; it is time you learned these chains: and diachronic exigence invoicing actions for account, withdrawal or receipt; you cannot, dear, pile debt on debt against the sweet collateral of undiminished wifely love. All charges get called in: the best investments badly husbanded fall into bankruptcy. And so I beg you not to spend your substance — a life waits for your tendering.

EXEUNT

the moon hung there bald as your head

you said: its bed my sweet, or else

goodbye. It seemed a pity, but that

was no choice I tucked my tail

under, as dogs repulsed and dancers do

and turned and went. Exeunt, you and I.
Ask any local cricketer from Leonora Estate to Blairmont Estate in Guyana who is this chap call Pandit. The cricketer would watch you straight in you face as if you stupid, click he tongue like turkey, inhale one draught fresh air, and sigh as if he miss something precious.

"Ha boy! Pandit! Eh-eh, he is a specialist in cooking mutton curry," the cricketer would say, smacking he tongue as if the mutton curry in front he eye... "Anytime ahwe cricket team going to play against Lusignan cricket team, by hooks or crooks, I bound to get in that team. Know why? Is Pandit self cooking the mutton curry and dalpurri for the two cricket team. He is Lusignan cricket team master cookman, you hear? Boy is a love to eat Pandit mutton curry while them two team retire fo lunch. Eh-eh, is like you get new life in you body. You could bowl more longer than Wesley Hall in the hot hot sun."

Pandit rep gone so far that even them sport-loving whiteman and white women from Georgetown city who does attend presentation in Lusignan Community does be carried-away like a child seeing Father Christmas the moment Pandit succulent mutton curry drop in they mouth. If they ain't careful they could bite off they tongue. Them whiteman does sigh yeh yeh. the mutton curry gravee running down they lip, eye red and watery, the taste biting they tongue.

Eh-eh, some eating mutton curry voraciously as if is the last time they seeing mutton curry. Some filling they stomach until they can't move, lost to know how mutton curry could be prepared in such a mouth-watering manner. The garlic and geerah still on you tongue. Is like reading good poetry one whiteman say.

"That Indian hand set to prepare mutton curry," Mr. Douglas'd tell them chaps one Sunday afternoon in Lusignan Centre. This time Mr. Douglas come pissing drunk after he stuff down bowl after bowl of mutton curry, using he finger like fork. Then he lick them fingers as if them fingers is mutton self, sucking it chu chu...

With all due respect them chaps had to lift-off Mr. Douglas from the chair that afternoon. Mr. Douglas is a big thing in Bookers. Was in the 1960s time. Bookers been own most of the sugar plantations in Guyana. All the while Mr. Douglas belching, belching then he let-go a fart. It sound like thunder. Mr. Douglas feel a great ease. Was ready to attack more mutton curry.

This time Mr. Douglas fart smell pure mutton curry. And you dare not laugh when Mr. Douglas fart. Mr. Douglas is a big thing. One bad word from he mouth and Lusignan cricket team come in shambles. A good word from he, and any member in the cricket team could get an office job. You only have to know to spell you name and add two and two...

In truth is Pandit mutton curry does take Mr. Douglas to Lusignan Community Centre whenever the cricket team invite another team to play cricket. Them chaps say Mr. Douglas navel string left in the
Centre, in the kitchen, where Pandit does cook the mutton.

"Never know a whiteman who like mutton curry like Mr. Douglas," them chaps does say. "If all whiteman been stay like Mr. Douglas ahwe Indian people coulda be far in dis country."

One Sunday evening Lusignan cricket team was celebrating victory. They'd wash Enmore cricket team for a song. Two to one. Them chaps say Enmore cricketers stuff so much mutton curry during the luncheon interval that they couldn't able to bowl when they land-in the ground. Then Lusignan star batsmen Hakim and Solo hitting the ball blam, bladam. Is sheer four and six. Them chaps say if B.L. Crombie was present he woulda turn commentator.

And if you'd see sluggish fielding! Eh-eh, them Enmore players claim the ball was too quick for they grasp. They been moving in the ground as if egg stick between they leg. They say the mutton curry get them drunk. They only belching and farting in the field, and they coulda empty-down mugs of ice-water. And the joke is, Enmore is a strong team.

Them Lusignan spectators really taunt them bitch. "Stuff more mutton curry. Stuff more..."

While celebrating this victory the same evening Mr. Douglas shout, the mutton curry gravee dripping down he lip blop blop... "Where is the cookman?" Mr. Douglas ask, commandingly just like how Estate manager barking at you.

The Centre caretaker been believe he woulda fall down. You see Mr. Douglas voice'd roar like cannon. This time the Lusignan cricketers serenading in the Centre hall, drinking and smoking, laughing he he he. And cricket history flying out they head. Eh-eh, is Hall and Griffith, Sobers and Kanhai, Godfrey Evans and Walley Grout! Kensington Oval, Lords, Bourda Green... Is like the whole Wisden in them cricketers head.

Meanwhile the caretaker task was to get Pandit for Mr. Douglas. The caretaker heart in he hand. Can't afford to vex Mr. Douglas. And where is this blasted man Pandit? the caretaker say, checking the Centre kitchen, the library, the film room and the store-room. Can't vex Mr. Douglas...

"Is where de hell you been"? the caretaker ask soon as he spot Pandit, standing in the outside hall smoking, and watching the empty ground.

"Is what you mean"? Pandit ask in anticipation. "Mean to tell me the mutton curry done?".

"The big man self, Mr. Douglas want see you," the caretaker talk. "And is important."

Sametime Pandit feel a chillyness run thru he spine. He heart beating bap bap... Mr. Douglas! That big man! But is an order. Pandit had to go. Mr. Douglas is a big thing in Bookers. He out the cigarette quick time and follow the caretaker, thinking how to answer the big man soon as the big man start talk to him in backra man English. Them words so crisp and cutting, you would believe is Dutch. And the big man self want see me.

Soon as Pandit glimpse the big man in the Centre bar corridor he start tremble.
“This is de cookman bass,” the caretaker point at Pandit and say. Then he hurry to refill Mr. Douglas glass.

Mr. Douglas eye’d red as if it turn bloodshot, and the words gurgling in he mouth, mix with spittle. You would believe he is in a different world.

“Take a seat man,” Mr. Douglas order Pandit.

Quick time Pandit find a chair, still trembling. This time the cricketers and a handful of fans, still drinking and gaffing, guffawing like pigs. Some seated in chairs. Others with full glass in they hand saunter about. The atmosphere lively. The scent of brown rum and mutton curry rolling about like rainclouds. The caretaker and assistant busy.

“Tell me the secret of your cooking. Why your mutton curry is so tasty?” Mr. Douglas ask persuasively, smacking he tongue, eyes flitting drunkenly. Mutton curry still settle on he lip.

“Me na know bass,” Pandit say uneasily, the words choke in he throat. He could never make head-an-tail of this backra man language never mind he working in Lusignan Estate for donkey years now...

“But how you don’t know man?” Mr. Douglas question impatiently, eyeing at Pandit in friendliness.

Pandit feel Mr. Douglas eye want bore he inside. O God! this is a big man and me can’t displease he. But is what me going tell he? Is how me does do the mutton piece by piece til it done cook, eh? But me have to tell Mr. Douglas something. Then in a flash Pandit recall he baap...

“Never fraid white people na matter you can’t spell you name. Always get commonsense in you head. They would respect you fo that...” he baap, a darkskin Madrasi man from South India always drum them words in Pandit ears.

After pandit mumma’d drop dead with bronchitis he baap self bring he up, teaching he how to cook all them Indian dishes which he baap know. Pandit was about eight years old, attending the Estate school, not too far from the Sugar Factory.

He baap’d never believe in much eddication. “Once you get commonsense people going to respect you,” he baap use to say in the dark logle near the fig tree. Them words stick in Pandit head like glue. Attending school make no sense to Pandit. Was just a formality as though he marking time. He feel more at home sling-shotting at birds, thiefing jamoon in cow pasture, playing marble, bathing in the canal where fine shrimp prick ing you like needle, jumping like flying fish in the black water canal.

And was a blessing in disguise that morning when teacher Jodhan flog Pandit. A girl student complaint teacher Jodhan that Pandit curse she. Teacher Jodhan let-go bakers’ dozen at Pandit behind. Pandit bawl for murder. The class watching at teacher Jodhan with wide-eye. If a pin been drop you could hear.

Pandit march out school with hurt in he eye, he behind biting as if ants crawling on it. When he show he baap he behind, he baap want overturn the logle. Passion turn into froth on he chillam-stain lip, he brown teeth grinding yap yap. “Teacha beat am me betta,” he baap talk and fly out the logle, Pandit following.
Teacher Jodhan want fly out the school window soon as he see Pandit baap and Pandit walking straight at he class, the hackia stick in Pandit baap hand. Pandit baap still grinding he teeth, froth leaking down he mouth now. But is the hackia stick which cause teacher Jodhan to shake like cane-arrow.

Teacher Jodhan know them sugar workers don't mince matters too much. And they na get head to reason. The fastest thing they could resort to is the hackia soon as you eye-pass them, or want push you finger in they eye.

Is quite a few bombastic teachers nearly get they head split-open like coconut. They'd pass P.T. and believe they know the world of teaching. That whipping a child could discipline he head to take education... pounds shilling and pence... Baba black sheep have you any wool....

But was the other way around with sugar workers. The hackia stick does talk for them. If them bombastic teachers didn't request a quick transfer they skull woulda be fractured with hackia stick lash. And teacher Jodhan know all the incidents that centred around the infamous hackia. Sugar workers love to use it.

Teacher Jodhan eye been spell terror. The chalk slip thru he finger flups, and rebound on the floor blops. Then he watch at the window on the eastern school wall. If Pandit baap only attempt to fire the hackia at he, he would make a quick dash like monkey, flying thru the window just like a cat with a stolen-fish in he mouth. Meanwhile the class come quiet like mice.

"Teacha teacha," Pandit baap advance in front the class and shout threateningly.

Teacher Jodhan back-back, watching the hackia In Pandit baap hand. He eye Wide-open, averaging the spring he going to make to the window.


Teacher Jodhan sigh, then he wipe he face with he handkerchief and whisper: "Praise God. Never trust them coolie with hackia stick."

This is the way how Pandit quit school. He start haunt the cow pasture, Cabbage Dam, Mule-stable, doing all the mischievious things which fly in he mind. While he baap in the canefields working, Pandit and one-two boys killing the whole day.

But as the weeks turn into months, months turn into years, Pandit baap diligent like a school master does show Pandit piece by piece how to prepare potato curry, chicken curry, mutton curry. "If me drop am dead, you going know to feed you own belly," Pandit baap does advise Pandit in the logie kitchen, the spice, garlic, and massala want stifle you nose.

When Pandit put-on long pants and believe heself a big man, and start work in Estate Mule-gang, he'd know the art of preparing a tasty
curry, and was wanted by wedding-houses in the Estate as the chief cookman.

And due to he cooking he start mix heself among drivers, book-keeper, dispenser, and overseer, specially at wedding-houses. But the moment them overseer and the book-keeper and dispenser start talk in backra man English, Pandit slipping out the company. Them words too big for he. And if the overseer should turn and ask Pandit for his comment, is like asking a door post. Is how he could answer when he na understand A to Z? Talk in Pandit own mix madrasi and creolese tongue, and Pandit with you eye to eye.

The only virtue Pandit possess is he commonsense. He always keep he head cool like cucumber. But when Mr. Douglas question he, he make sure he watch Mr. Douglas lip before he answer. “Once you put correct geera and garlic and salt in curry, then you stir, then you taste, you bound to get correct taste,” Pandit clear he throat and say. He want disappear.

O, Mr. Douglas shake he head, drain the glass of rum in he mouth, and declare: “I will get you a job as chef in a hotel. Think about it and let me know.”

“Yes baas,” Pandit reply and vanish out of the Centre.

Hotel chef! Ever see such eye-pass? Me going make meself one jackass when them big tourist and big shot clap they hand and order in backra man English to bring this dish and that dish. Eh-eh! Thinking about it the next evening Pandit feel confused. He was in his front verandah, regaling. He just bathe he skin after arriving from the canefields.

Me damn happy. EH! Pandit remind heself. As a bull-boy in the backdam, the job paying well. Is a lot of overtime specially when loaded cane punt stuck in the canals and them bull and mule had to take rest three-four time before they pull in them punts at the Sugar Factory. And by then is midnight. Overtime payment. But not every night it happening.

Beside, Pandit get he own house, built with a loan from the Estate. He wife still working as a weeder. He four children look healthy. Is what the ass me want with hotel job? He tell heself the third time. Me getting all the satisfaction cooking mutton curry for them cricketer. That is me happiness...

And is true! Cooking in he blood. You know how much people does request Pandit presence the cook night at wedding-houses? The whole Scheme. Pandit does feel nice when he get the invitation. “Never mind me can’t read an write. People respect me”, he does tell he wife sometime. Commonsense beat eddication, he baap words does echo in he ears. And if me didn’t know to cook good mutton curry people woulda spit at me. True, is every kiss-me-ass bady want make you a damn fool when you can’t read an write in this place. Good thing me apply me commonsense! eh...

But though cooking mutton curry giving Pandit maximum satis­faction he still feel a bit empty. Unwanted. Feel left-out in certain conversation held by the street-corners. In order to arrest this feeling
Pandit start see American cowboy films, picking up the language easy-easy. But when them hard back, sunburnt cowboy like Gary Cooper, Allan Rocky Lane, Broderick Crawford, talk in tough-guy, drawling voice, cigar stuck between they lip, Pandit does still believe them cowboy talking Dutch.

But he does pick up the cowboy conversation step by step although he jawbone does crack whenever he utter them slangs. And if you say: "hey man come here," in heavy cowboy slang, Pandit quick to respond. True. Sometime Pandit would say: "hey man draw your gun..." action and slang in typical cowboy style. But later he jaw does pain he as if he get tooth-ache... But Pandit does feel nice. Is like climbing Mount Roraima. But he could never confront the Manager or the Overseer face to face, and talk to him in backman English. Like something does hold back he tongue. He courage gone.

Pandit love to see American cowboy films. "Cooking and seeing picture is me only satisfaction in life," he does tell them chaps at wedding-houses. "Is God make it so. Every man gat to find he own satisfaction in life. If you use commonsense properly you going to feel nice in what you doing. If you don't use commonsense you explode. Think life is only work, eat and sleep? Ha boy! You have to know to make you self happy in this Scheme..."

Watching cowboy films does elevate Pandit. He does feel like being in a different world. Hard and rugged. Is man against he fellow man, the terrain mountainous, gunshots exploding all in you ears. Them with commonsense does survive. Is not strength. Is commonsense! Pandit does tell heself. Is just like the canefields. Hard. But commonsense beat all. Not the pundit and majee advice. Eh-eh! Them does tell people sheer piss one-two time. But he respect the pundit and majee. They know to read the books. But they na live properly. Pandit does feel like spit. Is only money, money they want. That is not religion?

"Eh-eh, think pundit and majee could put food in you mouth", Pandit’d tell he wife one morning. "Learn fo think fo youself and use you commonsense. Life not easy..."

Come a time in the country now when local politics was swinging people head left to right like soldier marching. Some people coulda give up they life for the P.P.P. the P.N.C. or the U.F. party. Who couldn’t read and write get sense overnight. They would argue politics more than me and you who went far in school. Eh-eh, is Colonialism, Capitalism, Communism... words rolling out they mouth like poetry. How England is a bitch. Take out all the country wealth. How it doesn’t want to grant the country independence....

"Them English people think we still ah slave?" them people does talk in the streets, sucking they teeth schuu schuu ... "And Duncan Sandys taking all order from America. See kiss-me-ass eye-pass?"

"Know how much C.I.A in this country? Why the hell they na left ahwe in peace?" them young boys does talk. They coulda kill themself for the P.P.P.

Meanwhile them black people does say this is not Africa. This is Guyana. Like England want bleed Guyana just how it bleed Africa?
Cause big-big war among them black people over there. Whiteman and blackman at war. Like they want a next Kenya or South Africa.

True to God, politics make people come wise overnight. The atmosphere always tense and expectant. It does want to explode like a cannon whenever them politicians done address people in the country areas and in Bourda Green.

"Independence. Independence. Why the hell the Queen don't give the country independence?"

Then bladam like bullet one proclamation come from the Queen that the country, Guyana, on the mainland of South America, would be granted its independence soon after the general election in 1964. And which political party commands a majority of the voters, the leader of the same party would be Prime Minister, and usher the country in independence.

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Eh-eh, you would believe is Carnival break out in the streets. Jubilation in the air. And everybody calling each other Comrade. Was 1962 before the big race riots.

"When you too hasty to get something which you don't know about, you does land-in hot-water," Pandit tell them boys one mid-morning by the street-corner. Them sugar workers had a go-slow exercise. One driver been curse one canecutter. Soon as the canecutter talk for he right, the driver tell the overseer to suspend he from work. The go-slow exercise was in support of the canecutter.

"This independence thing na look too nice," Pandit add. "Jagan and Burnham should use more commonsense. Boy! When you playing with fire you bound to get burn. Is that what really going to happen with Jagan and Burnham. They swell-headed. To run country is not plaything."

But it had a set of young people, among them is the local cricketers, who like the British rule. Who want to keep they British passport. But soon as the country come independent you come Guyanese overnight. You getting Guyanese passport. When the set of young people hear that. them fart sametime. Think is joke! Who want Guyanese passport?

Then the big emigration thing start. Them young people, sportsman and teachers, forsaking the country for England. Who want Guyanese passport? Even them who can't read and write like Baij. Soony and Speedy, hustling to get British Passport to exit the bloody country. Was like a fever gripping the country. Is pure England, England in they head...

This time them politicians want cut each other throat. Say how Jagan going to sell the country to the Russians. How Burnham taking ahve back to Africa. D'Aguiar to America. You would believe is a war break out between them politicians.

Meanwhile was confusion and commotion among the country people. Worse yet when them men drink bush rum. Is only Burnham and Jagan in they mouth, and the coolie people and black people shoulda work together.

"People getting damn stoopid nowadays." Pandit does talk, sad to
see that them good cricketers too going away to England. "England running this country so nice. Independence going make it worse. Mark me word...."

True! He would miss cooking mutton curry and dalpurri for them cricketers. Schuu schuu schuu ... and is how nice he does feel while them cricketers stuffing the mutton, calling fo Pandit, Pandit, smacking they tongue. Is like he fullfilling a calling, cooking mutton for them cricketers. And he love to watch the game.

Suddenly one evening during the same period the Lusignan Cricket team Captain and vice-captain arrive at pandit house. "We taking you to England Pandit," the captain say. "You would do a hefty business with mutton curry and dalpurri among the West Indians in London..."


A chillyness invade pandit inside. He watch the Captain straight in he face and say: "All yuh go first, me going come later."

The Captain believe.

With the departure of the Captain and vice-captain to London the Lusignan cricket team come in shambles. All the best players gone to England. Pandit job as cookman end. Pandit feel empty like one barrel. He couldn't catch he bearings.

Eh-eh, three months later Pandit start play the tassa-drum at wedding-houses. Watching Pandit playing you believe he merge he entire soul in the drum as if he whole body inside the goatskin, eye closed as though in trance.

When them chaps ask he why he playing the tassa-drum now, Pandit clear he throat and say: "When one door close, another door open. This country like that. Always have to find something to pass you spare time. Life is not work, eat, and sleep. Is something else. Use you commonsense and living get a purpose."
THE SATIN PRINCESS

In the drear mist of Long Island Sound
I think of the Satin Princess.
Hearing the cold clang of the fog-bells
I see again her moon-walk on the river:
All around her from the forest
The warm breath of flowers.
This clammy morning
Pale as ice seem the ladies'
Wrapped, colourless faces:
Their breath puffs white
And bitter are their eyes.
I recall the warm breathing
Of the far Princess.
She dresses with jewels:
The river fills with night,
Immense Van Gogh stars
Shine on her black bosom.
This pallid, shining world
Is bracing, bright, I know
But ah God! I shrivel in this land
Where life's laced tight
And unburnished air congeals.
The cold throws a spear
Through hearts here
Across half the earth
The Satin Princess moves and loves.

"HANGMAN" CORY

When the launch sank off Fort Island
People were drowning in the black mud
Bawling out "Oh God! Oh God!"
God did not come. It was like any day,
Sun shining on wind-rippled river,
Except men were struggling and dying,
Women and children choking in the mangrove roots.
People were running on the shore and calling
"Oh God! Oh God!" How God could come?
God can't mind everyone.
But look at this now! Look at story!
"Hangman" Cory arrive like God.
Let me tell you "Hangman's" story.

Nathaniel Cory once loved a lady
She was a wanton lady, she used him badly.
His mind stop work when he see her beauty:
He was a puppy-dog in her company,
People laugh at "kiss-she-foot-bottom" Cory.
This wanton lady take another man one day,
Open, brazen, she parade before Nathaniel Cory
Laugh and say for all to hear clearly
How this man was the sweetest man for she,
How Cory never, never could satisfy she.
Nathaniel Cory stay quiet all the long day
Night came and when the man lay with the lady
Cory walked in open so, easily, terribly,
Lash both two with his sharp timber-axe fiercely
Cut them in pieces like red melons on a tray.
When judge-man say she provoke the jealousy
And Cory get only five years off his liberty
"No! No! No! No!" shouted Nathaniel Cory,
"She be life, my love, my beauty,
I have to go to hell with she, my life, my beauty.
She only gone in front of me.
Hang me by the neck to die gladly,
Hang me high, high and quickly!"
The people whispering make it legendary:
It so he get the name of "Hangman" Cory.

Off Fort Island that bright morning
Was he who God send to save the people.
People bawling on the black stelling for a saviour,
They never expect to see "Hangman" Cory come.
He live so quiet among them all the years,
Minding a pumpkin patch behind the white Chapel,
He smoke his thorn pipe, never say one word.
There he stood on the black stelling like a God.
Bibi La Fontaine, ice-pick thin and hard,
Fifty years trading plantain along the river coast,
Recount what happen that bright morning in her life.
Launch just left the Fort to go Parika side,
Deep inside boat-belly a thunder-sound was heard:
Time flicker, in a second, in a cat-wink
Boat gone bottom. How quick it was:
She belched a warm beer she was drinking,
Before the belch belch good the boat capsize and gone.
"Under I go the whole boat on top of me:
Mud yellow dim my eyes, cold log brace my heart.
I see my little Fancy who die fifty years gone by,
And then I see for sure is the monster death that come.
And my mind saying why an old woman should struggle so,
Let me go, and still I fighting not to go
And there is Fancy, the little one, crying in my arms.
A rough hand come and choke me round the neck
And pull me where I done pin good in mud
This man had come for me in the dark water,
He find me like a miracle and take me safe ashore:
Sun so bright, earth hard, I hear a singing bird.
Never morning wind feel so sweet, you hear I give my word."

"Hangman" dive and dive in the dark water.
Everyone like they turn to stone but he:
Women bawling and running and pointing trembly
Big men shouting and doing nothing foolishly.
Only "Hangman" Cory doing the work of God.
And everytime he come up with another one
As if God guide him in the mangrove mud.
A score he save and still he went for more
Coming up with weed-tendrils round his head
And wound around his throat like gallow's rope
He delivering up children from the river-womb,
His eyes staring red and cold and terrible,
Not one word he said in all his glory.

These are the plain facts about "Hangman" Cory,
His day of evil, his day of glory:
He cut his beauty up like a red melon in the market;
God send him one day to save the drowning people.
Time will sort the meaning of all this out:
The hunting moon will rise one last, appalling, time
And he will come to rest like all men come to rest.
Though years pass, men should know his story:
"Oh God! Oh God!" the people call and God send
"Hangman" Cory.
CECIL GRAY

CARNIVAL FLAG-WOMAN

The room is darkened, as befits the time; the dancers jerk like junkies up and down as passion disregards its thin disguise. The singers' voices pump with coarsened cries a carnal message of the carnival.

But there is one who prances sick of heart; whose whoops are rites of burial in the dark. The balloons of her days that rose so high are curled up scraps of cringeing rubber now trampled by those who revelled in her thighs.

Fresh from her loins the murals that they painted portrayed her on her knees, where, like a child, she did not understand that men will talk of those they count as prey, nor thought of how they'll dance away with all her future tainted.

The sticks of pleasure she at random tasted were paid for in a market where love dies; now fingers poke her name into the slime and whispers dress her as the revell's clown. Around her feet streamers of faith lie wasted.

She moves her body now in joyful style, wears merriment as costume for the night, as if her cloud of shame had taken flight. It is their smiling glances she defies and from her leaping sorrow turns her eyes.

TONY KELLMAN

PARADISE
(For Winston)

A pepper tree poxed with blight. A black cat curled like a vowel at your carpeted feet. Your new watercolours bright like pendants on the wall. Eight o'clock and all ain't well.

We talk, we talk... and always the same conclusion. This island is a bad joke.

58
Art, a social insignia, is a sunken boat,  
The greater part of culture, farce and mimicry.  
Only the scansion of the word keeps me from drowning,  
Only my lover’s caress calms my tumult...  
Omnipresent gluttons bloated with greed  
assault your morality with their thirst for possessions.  
They swagger like untrained models  
lumbering down a cat-walk. The background,  
a resplendent logo of sea and sun:  
the cruelest bitterest irony.

Your return is an aquarium snapper  
excited by the thought of salt-water,  
Unaware that lurking there  
is a barbaric barracuda.

In a society where without reasons  
originality is flushed into the sea,  
one must choose one’s weapons carefully!  
That inner watercourse must be found  
as a lance to wield on this chaotic mound.  
The sunrise, cupola of silence,  
be your glaring shield!

Claustrophobia, that inveterate terror,  
makes you wonder if exile’s not a better niche,  
To survive here, idealism must be firmly leashed.  
It took Walcott fifty years to realize his error.

The metropolis has its own brand of horror,  
there is the weather, the bullet, the dagger  
lurking in the underground (Did you say the palms  
are glistening spears? the khus-khus, knife-blades  
fanning round and round?)...

This land, as unchanging as a mirror,  
is still, after all, my home;  
If I can live with foreign terror,  
I can live with my own.

A pepper tree fleshted with lamp-light.  
A cat yawning like a vowel  
uncurling. Newly-hung oils bright  
like pendants on the wall. Mid-night, and all ain’t well.
WILTSHIRE CAR DEAD

by RAS MICHAEL

Wiltshire car died. Wiltshire car just sputtered and died. The day that Wiltshire car died, Wiltshire just stand up there and let out one big sigh. Look is better to tell the truth, Wiltshire hang he head down and cried.

Wiltshire car broke its heart out and died and old Wiltshire stood there and cried that Saturday afternoon outside Lucius Rum Shop.

The car give two gasps and shudder and belch a black soot on a little girl dress up in ribbon bow and a new stockings.

"Wiltshire I ain't able with you an this old thing," Miss Margery said as she squeezed out breast after breast, then hold she breath and bruise she belly through the rear door. The other two passengers done gone through the other door and reach up the road hustling for Russell Street and reliable transportation. They ain't even bother tell Wiltshire nothing. The two old women in the front seat start to complain through the open door that they tell Wiltshire to make sure he car was fit cause where they going find transport home?

Wiltshire stand up and cried and the passersby and people drinking over at Lucius Rum Shop and the little girl that the car belch the black soot on, stood up and watched a white steam rise out from under Wiltshire car bonnet. Then the car suddenly get tall as though it tip-toe on its chasis. Then it shuddered again. The little girl, people drinking over at Lucius Rum Shop and passersby stood up and watched Wiltshire car die. It shuddered and danced, a dance to its own solemn rattle. Its lifeless wheels splayed outwards as it sink, its body mere inches from the tar.

Is all well and good to curse old Wiltshire about he car. True is a old time Vauxhall Velox and when the brakes taking too long to make the car stop, old Wiltshire does whistle a whistle and grip the wheel like to hold it back. all that is true, but what about Wiltshire part of it?

The people say that the couple of springs left in the seats uses to tear they clothes. Teacher Morris say at top speed of fifteen miles per hour Wiltshire car make he go to school late three days straight. Wiltshire say he lucky, some people ain't reach to work yet, they still waiting 'pon transport. And when you look at it, maybe is not Wiltshire fault. Car parts were hard to get. As a matter of fact, foreign currency was hard to get to buy spare-parts. Foreign currency was the problem. And Wiltshire had currency problems. He barely eked out a existence collecting a dollar for his run from East and West Ruimveldt to Bourda Market. Foreign currency! Local currency was Wiltshire problem. That and the daily break-down and the road-side impromtu repair work-shops he established as the necessity arose. But really and truly things get much worse when everybody god-mother, grand-mother, sister and brother start to send and bring mini-bus in the country.

You see what happen was that getting most essential things was
difficult and the Government say that it got what they call foreign currency problems. Since then a whole portion of hustlers turn out to work on America Street and begin buying money up blackmarket and sell it all out blackmarket.

They say the Government didn’t like this since this same blackmarket money use to find it way into foreign country to buy needed essentials which traders sell at real high prices. A lot of these essentials was car-parts and Guyana didn’t have enough car. It didn’t have enough taxi. That is why so many people was always standing up on the road waving like if they going away tomorrow when the cars drive pass. Which is why Wiltshire feel shame.

Wiltshire feel shame for all them people out there on Sheriffs Street who was punishing for transportation whole day, every day while he was living quite well without burdensome responsibility. Wiltshire had retired and had a little money. He could live cool at his grand-son and his family.

‘I have a little money,’ Wiltshire say to himself.

‘I could set up a transportation and help out the situation.’

Truth was that Wiltshire was a truck driver with the Government before he had retired and he was used to making friends quickly, especially women, through his job.

Driving motor-car was the correct runnings, Wiltshire felt. There were dozens of women on Sheriffs Street, nice young women. It wasn’t that Wiltshire was a fresh old man. It was that he had this talent for making friends quickly, especially women. So Wiltshire seize the oppo-tunity. For example when Campbellville traffic slow down after lunch Wiltshire use to make a last trip up West and East Ruimveldt. Was a last trip for truth because whenever he hit East back road, anything could happen. Sometimes you use to see two/three passengers walking coming up and somebody would look out they window and say ‘Wiltshire bruk-down.’ But next day he gone again. He was a determined man. Was because he was a determined man that he set up the Vauxhall Velox that he did buy a couple years ago and repair it. He decide to use some of the little money he did put one side for old age and invest it in second hand tyre and so.

That is why Wiltshire did stand up there and cry, that car did represent Wiltshire whole life savings.

Nobody didn’t know or care where Wiltshire get he car parts or how he get them but one or two people did say they hear Wiltshire used to stop little children when they playing and examine they playthings. One thing I know for sure I never see Wiltshire in no mechanic shop yet, even though Wiltshire car always used to park up on some parapet with Wiltshire under it. Wiltshire say is rest it resting.

Wiltshire did prefer the Housing Scheme run to the Campbellville one. Housing Scheme girls was different to the Campbellville passen­gers. The Campbellville ones was mostly teacher or office girls or young bodies seeking other young bodies. But all of these was in the Housing Scheme run and more. More women. The kind that Wiltshire was comfortable with, big, broad and wuthless in conversation. Wiltshire did develop such a reputation that at one time they had people who did rather
stand up by Wiltshire car 'pon the roadside and wait till he either walk
to the Esso for more gasolene, roll one of he smooth tyred wheels to a
vulcanizing shop or squirm out from under the engine, than to travel with
any other car. And sameway, Wiltshire had he special passengers.
People used to stand up 'pon the road and tell them Tapir drivers
whenever they pull and shout "Georgetown/Housing Scheme", "We
waiting for Wiltshire." Wiltshire car itself was prejudiced, it didn't mind
who it pick up as long as the passenger had money and did like a good
gaff and a laugh. Of course it did prefer women more since was women
who did really know 'bout everybody story. Wiltshire car used to well and
enjoy the gossip and laughter and when it tired, it just used to break
down.

Wiltshire car use to get plenty competition at first from them
Tapirs. Was Tapirs all about, picking up East Coast passengers, running
up South, Sussex Street, Housing Scheme, and then slowly, slowly they
bow out one by one, which is why Wiltshire old car wasn’t worried even
when the first mini-buses start run Campbellville route.

The Tapirs them did start to stop run. Wiltshire car was as un­
concerned as when they did first join the business. Wiltshire old car
proper use to enjoy heself whenever he was out on the road, running and
picking up all them girls, even pulling up he brakes right in front of them
big Tata Buses and taking away they passengers once is a woman.
Nobody couldn’t say Wiltshire car wasn’t a good hustler. However,
Wiltshire car, though it was looking for a dollar just as much as Wiltshire,
use to pride itself that it was more sweet-man than Wiltshire, with the
girls. It use to laugh at them modern motor-car cause they wasn’t as hard
as he.

'Look at them how they soft' Wiltshire old car say. 'Is years since
I come here on the road and look how me body still black and hard and
shine.' Wiltshire old car was vain. But then suddenly so things change
up and get different again.

At first was second hand clothes, still looking new but was second
clothes that people in America did already wear. After that people
start get in on the latest fashion and even the old girls them start wearing
stone-wash jeans and bobby-socks with sneakers. After-a-while one set
of motor-scooter come in the country and poor people start ride them. By
the time the mini-bus them land everybody was looking nice.

Plenty people stop travel with Wiltshire car. I mean afterall, if you
got on a new stone-wash and you going to market with attache case, well
then you can’t look to travel in no old Vauxhall Velox. It got to be
something more new, like a Hiace mini-bus with tape deck and passen­
gers so that you could look out the window and play important by
pretending you ain’t see nobody. A lot of people in Campbellville start to
do just that and soon time come that Wiltshire nor Wiltshire old car
wasn’t getting they usual kind of customer.

Wiltshire change he route to the Housing Scheme.
Every morning that the car wasn’t sick, Wiltshire and the car
down at Regent and Bourda Street hustling passengers for East and
West. They use to cut through Charlotte catch Camp street, bounce over
Sussex and take Russell through to West backroad with stiff tantalize and laugh echoing all through the city. As a matter of fact they use to blow two horn whenever they drive pass Lucius Rum Shop 'pon Camp Street to let the people in there know that they happy too. Wiltshire car was so happy that it use to roll up it light bulb and rev up it engine whenever it passing a woman with a chassis it admire.

When more mini-bus come they start to run South. Lazzo did send down plenty. Then more mini-bus come and they even start to run East and West.

Wiltshire old car take in with bad feelings that same Friday morning when a mini-bus pull up right in they car park and the conductor shout out "East and West Ruimveldt".

Old Wiltshire take on. Whole day Wiltshire use to be smiling and laughing, now Wiltshire grumbling and fretting and forgetting people change. One by one the passengers get less. Wiltshire old car ain't say nothing. It start to work more hard. No softly, softly 'now come' mini-bus from America ain't gon make it look small, gon take it eyes and pass it. 'Is only because Burnham dead,' it grumble to itself. 'or they won't of be here.'

For two months straight Wiltshire car ain't breakdown. It jostle with all the new mini-buses for the passengers. It didn't even checking for young girls no more and one exceptionally busy Saturday morning, Wiltshire car even touch a top speed of twenty miles per hour, but things couldn't go on so forever.

Well Wiltshire hear like if a big choir singing 'What A Friend We Have In Jesus' and like if the whole sound big up in the skies and the whole outside world. He get a sudden feeling like if God upstairs watching down at he and the car and he raise he hand up and look over he shoulder, right up in the sky just over the incinerator 'pon Princess Street where the Government use to throw way old car and old truck. Wiltshire imagine he see a big cloud like a face watching down at them. Every body, the passersby, the little girl with the ribbon bow and even the people at Lucius come out and watch up in the sky like Wiltshire but they ain't see nothing. Only Wiltshire did see.

'Is because Burnham dead,' Wiltshire say.

Nobody never see Wiltshire again. We hear that he was living at the Dharam Sala poor house opposite the burial ground where the City Council did throw away the chassis of the old car. And everytime I hear that hymn 'What A Friend We Have In Jesus' I does remember how Wiltshire car dead.
Stanley Maycock was fascinated by dinosaurs. He was sitting on the carpet looking at a big illustrated book all about them, which he had got out of the Children’s Department at the Public Library in Coleridge Street.

“Mummy?” His mother was sprawled all over the sofa, in the middle of piles of sixth-form essays which she was marking. Some of them seemed very long, and Stanley hoped he never had to do so much homework when he got older.

“Mummy?” She grunted at him, without looking up from her work.

“Do you think it would be nice to have a brontosaurus as a pet?”

“Don’t be silly darling. We wouldn’t have any place to put it.” Stanley continued to pore over the book. Suddenly he picked it up and took it over to his mother.

“Look, it says here ‘dinosaur’ mean ‘thunder-lizard’...”

“Means,” she corrected, interrupting him.

“... so is a lizard a sorta dinosaur?”

“I suppose you could say they were distant relatives.”

“You mean like how my Auntie Ethel who isn’t really my auntie is a relative?”

“Sort of.”

“So you mean the lizard that lives behind the picture is like a baby dinosaur?”

“No, it isn’t. Now go away and let me get on with my work.”

At this point Melanie came in. “Hi, mummy! Can me an’ Glyne borrow the car?”

“Lord have mercy! I spend half my life teaching English and I can’t even get my own children to talk properly. No, you cannot borrow the car.”

“BUT, mummy, you know Glyne’s a careful driver!”

“No teenager is a careful driver. Heaven knows what you’d be getting up to.”

“We only want to go to the East Coast Road,” said Melanie, getting plaintive.

“No, I tell you. Wait — I need some peace and quiet. You can have the car if you take Stanley with you.”

“Mummy, do we have to!”

“Yes,” she said, the red-ink pen poised once more above essays scrawled in blue and black, ready to strike.

Stanley sat in the back of the car as they headed out of Rock Dundo Park and up Lodge Hill, through Warrens, Jackson, Bridgefield and on in the direction of St.Andrew. His sister and her boyfriend talked the whole way. Stanley was not included in the conversation, but he was quite happy staring out of the window. He could not remember seeing
this part of the island before. It was very different from the bustle of town and school, or the concrete boxes surrounded by neat lawns and well-trimmed hedges where he lived. There was field after field of sugar-cane, the first arrows of next year's crop waving in the breeze. And after Welchman Hall, as they began to drive downhill again, the cane-fields began to give way to vast open hillside, covered in rough pasture, with here and there the line of a gully marked by a thick growth of trees.

They came on to the flat towards Belleplaine and drove round to the East Coast Road. Glyne soon pulled the car off the road and parked it under some casuarina trees. They got out and walked along a path. Glyne and Melanie walked ahead, carrying the cooler between them. Stanley lagged behind, with the bundled up beach-towels.

And suddenly he ran after them, waving a long leafy stalk he had pulled up, a five-petalled white flower at the end of it.

"Melanie! Melanie! What this is?"

"Stanley, I don't know! An' you shouldn't go grabbin' up every plant you see — this one over here is a manchineel."

"But, wait," said Glyne, pointing at a nearby bush, "sea-grape! An' it got ripe ones 'pon it too!" They put down the cooler and started picking the grapes.

"Here, you can eat this." Melanie handed her brother a small, rather wrinkled, purplish fruit. Stanley looked at it questioningly, and then bit into it. It was sweet, but with a faint hint of salt.

"Crunch up the seed an' see what it taste like," Glyne told him. He did so, and spat it out almost at once. "Man, it too bitter!" Melanie laughed.

They walked on, and the path came out into an open space. A rich green plant, with bright yellow flowers close to the ground, covered much of the soil around them. Stanley's curiosity got the better of him and he asked what it was.

"Carpet weed," said Glyne.

About a hundred yards ahead, some cows were grazing. Stanley counted them. There were three black and white cows, and seven brown and white cows. Beyond them was visible the edge of a flat body of water.

"Is that the sea?" Stanley asked.

"Boy, you really ask too much questions," Glyne said. "That ain' the sea, that is Long Pond." He and Melanie turned and walked towards a low hill and then up its slope. Stanley followed them. The hill was all made of sand, with strange plants growing on it. At the top he realized that the noise he had heard earlier was the sea roaring. There it was in front of them, crashing on to the beach below in torrents of white foam, in a way he had never seen when his mother took them swimming at Paradise.

"Look, Glyne," said Melanie, "fat porks!" Part of the slope of the sand-dune was covered by a dense growth about twelve or fourteen inches high, stalks with large, almost oval leaves slanted up towards the cloudless sky. Glyne and Melanie gathered a couple of handfuls of the red blobs which appeared among the leaves.

"Here." She offered one to her brother. "Just suck it off the stone.
The fruit was the size of a large marble, but dimpled and mottled in different shades of red, with bits of green in it as well. Only when Stanley saw his sister was eating one herself did he try it. The flesh inside was white like cotton-wool. It felt funny in his mouth, but it was quite nice.

"You like it?"
"Yeah."
She gave him some more. "Don't eat too many, or they going tie up your tongue."
They walked down again and skirted the pond. Coconut husks and old bottles littered the margin of sand and mud. Here there was a gap in the build-up of sand, and incoming waves, their force spent by the ten or fifteen feet from the edge of the surf, contributed a clear trickle to the murky water on the land side.

"Move fast," Glyne said. "Now!"
They got across with dry feet, between one wave and the next, their rubber flip-flops slapping the damp sand. Now they were on the other side of the pond, and Stanley could see it was only about twenty feet wide. Little brown-speckled birds with long beaks, long legs protruding from white bellies, scuttled about on the mud. A plop caught his attention.

"Look!" He caught Melanie's arm and she and Glyne turned round. Once again, three of four small fish leapt into the air and made a silvery curve back into the pond water.

"Hush your mouth and come 'long!" was Melanie's comment.
They walked along the beach, which stretched on and on in front of them, and was almost a hundred feet wide from the dunes to the sea. Here and there an empty plastic container, or an old aerosol can, or even a light bulb, showed the proximity of civilization, but there was no one else in sight.

They spread out the towels and sat down. There was a big purple towel, and a green and white striped towel, and Stanley's towel had pictures on it of cats trying to catch fish. Melanie pulled off the oversized white T-shirt she wore as a dress, revealing a long, leggy, golden-brown body in a black bikini. Glyne had on a pair of baggy beach-shorts and a shirt like the ones Magnum wore on the TV, except that the letters curling around the palm-trees and the surfer-topped waves spelt out "BARBADOS" instead of "HAWAII." He unbuttoned the shirt. Glyne was supposed to be white, but a tan made him almost as brown as Melanie. Stanley wore navy shorts and a T-shirt with a picture of a pelican sitting on an old cannon. It said "MARGARITA — ¡ LA ISLA MAS BELLA DEL CARIBE!" His mother had bought it for him when the three of them had gone there for a holiday and shopping trip just before last Christmas.

Melanie opened the cooler, which had in ice and bottled soft drinks. The opener was inside as well, but attached to one of the handles by a long piece of string so that it couldn't escape. She opened one of the bottles and gave it to Stanley, and then took for herself and Glyne. Stanley had finished the fat porks and was glad of the drink. He drank it all and stuck the bottle upright in the sand. He moved off the towels
and began to build a sandcastle. Nobody told him not to get sand on his
clothes, and he had already finished the outline of the castle — a square
with a turret at each corner — when he turned round, his ear caught
by something Glyne and Melanie were whispering.

They looked at him, and then, "We're going for a walk," said
Melanie. "So you stop here till we get back. You can have another drink
if you want one. Don't move too far from these towels, and don't go near
the sea. It too rough. You hear me?"

"Yeah," said Stanley.

Glyne and Melanie stood up. Melanie put back on the big T-shirt
and then they walked off, taking the purple towel with them.

Stanley added another tower in the middle of the castle to serve
as a keep. Then he carefully put extra sand all round the outside of the
top of the castle walls and round the top of the towers to make
battlements. He stood up, walking round the castle to look at it from all
angles. He sucked his teeth and gave the castle a kick, demolishing one
of the corner turrets. Then he set off down the beach towards the sea.

Crabs ran away from him as he approached. Little crabs and
bigger crabs, all with grey bodies supported on dirty white legs with a
yellow tinge to them. Some dipped into their holes. One of the big ones
headed purposefully into the surf. The sea looked very rough and Stanley
retraced his steps. Just below the high-water mark he spotted one of the
small crabs. Its colouring was the same, but it was so small as to be
almost transparent. He dived at it with both hands and caught it.

"Shite! It bite me!" He dropped it at once, and sought to crush it
with a safely ensandalled foot, but it moved too fast for him.

He continued back inland, past the towels and on to the line of
dunes. There were more fat porks growing here. Most of the fruit were
green, but he found a few ripe ones and picked them. He explored further,
eating as he went up the dune. He saw a long trailing green vine with
mauve flowers. There was what looked like a path, and he followed it now
moving down and sideways, away from the beach, but almost parallel to
it. There were more dunes, and casuarinas grew here, deformed, rising
as high as the top of the dunes and then bent inland by the wind. There
were sea-grapes too, but bigger than the ones he had seen earlier, much
taller than himself, with woody trunks grey like the crabs on the beach,
the veins crimson in their broad green leaves. Another kind of vine, its
flowers a different kind of purple, and with broad, flat green pods, wound
itself up into the casuarinas.

Stanley stopped, thinking he heard something. There was a
rustling sound, like somebody moving through the bush.

"Melanie? Glyne?" The rustling continued, very close.

"Melanie!" There was still no answer, though the sound seemed
to be right next to him. He was about to call out again when he saw them.

The rustling sound was right next to him. It was made by the
crabs, hundreds of them. They were all bigger than the beach crabs, and
these ones had blue-black bodies with legs and claws of an angry red.
They moved about under the sea-grapes, and around the vines, and
among the fat porks and over the carpet of brown needles cast by the
casuarinas. They rotated their stalked eyes to stare at him in defiant challenge, and waved their claws at him like banners.

Stanley ran. Stumbling in the loose sand, tripping over vines, he ran. He lost a sandal, and stopped for it, but the rustling sound was all around him, and he kept on running. He ran up dunes and down dunes and along dunes. And he crashed into a space under some casuarina trees where Glyne and Melanie sat up on the purple towel.

"Christ! How you did get here?" said Glyne.

Stanley paid him no attention, but rushed, sobbing, into his sister's arms. As she pressed him to her, trying to comfort him, he realized, puzzled, uncomprehending, that her breasts were quite naked.

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MAHADAI DAS

FOR MARIA de BORGES

Death, black moon, high mark
on night's blue canvas.

Stumped shadow beneath the lynching-tree.

A star hangs over me.
Dark sore.
Is it death?

Like a phantom
honied into walls,
I inhabit a city of steel.

Between its iron teeth, mechanical, regular;
in escalators, prisonlike elevators,
I am lifted indifferently, dropped

like a stone,

borne, like a jumbie
beneath stony earth.
Shadowless, I descend deeply
into nightmares of childhood;
down to steel-lined metros,
to summerheat that beats, insistent,
at my temples. Down, down to carriages.
grimy steel-boxes caging men like packhorses
being driven to a mill.

Down to obsessions caged underground -
down down down.

Phantomlike
I move in long narrow streets.
Down Broadway.
A single head of cattle exiled
from gentle grazings of our pasture.

From whence has this traveller come
with his long hair, his lost eyes?

I am a pair of hands.
A pair of feet.

Eyes without candle.

Bird stricken.

Shrunken globe, my joys,
small circumference.

My token is the same
Little copper sliver moving me around.
Little city token. Little metal ring.

Expensive little sliver.
Dear metal moon. Small perimeter of dreams.
Small perimeter of dreams.

II

A death-broker awaits me.
He counts his cash.

Slight and weary,
I stand. Tears
trail in the dust.

He takes all my jewels.
He takes all my rings.
He steals my rubies,
my rope of pearls.

He grabs my tiara, my bangles
of silver. He gives me tokens
to send me to his factory,
send me to his store,
cage me in his offices,
keep me in his kitchens.
At gunpoint, he steals rubies in my cheeks,
my full curve of hip.
He bestows me coppers -

so I may buy
a jacket for my shoulders
from his huge garment-store,
hose from his hosiery, wine from his cellars.

so I may purchase a space for my bed,
a closet for my clothing, a space
for my child
and a space for my spouse.

He takes moons from my eyes,
my fingers' nimble gifts -

he hands me rose colored glasses,
hard rimmed, rectangular.

I look through his spectacles.
I see him better.

Moons in my eyes are lost but to me
They have moved to another orbit
larger than me. In private
constellations, I only could see them.
Wheeling in wide orbit now,
all may espie them.

They are wheeling round and round
in a luminous light.

Dreamlight ignites them.
An inner lights.
Music, cosmos, world:

we are in harmony.

I surrender my tiara of stars.

He greedily grabs them.
He returns
cheap sparkle from his factories
cheap glitter from his streets.

I go there to buy
things that appear like the real,
spending my life in imitation,
ever knowing what's real.

What is real is what I've given,

What's real is a city token.

What's real is the theft.

I am a pair of hands.

A pair of feet.

III

Death rides,
high black moon over all my dreams.
Secret rider across sky's low fields.

Sacred shadow beneath the lynching-tree.

Like blue aether, I move
through streets of dreams.

I go to the river's edge
where the moon is real.

To sea's edge where moon's
dressed in silver.
I stare at the stony stars.

Waves of eternity wash over me.

I have come to the river.
I have come to the forest.
Forest of jade.
Forest of emerald.
Forest of clear streams in my head.

I am flesh and blood.
I breathe.
I eat like a lion when hungry.
I touch. I caress. I sigh upon another's neck.
I am man, love.
I am woman, love.

IV

Tomorrow, I rise
between dead thighs of another day.
To be bridled, like a horse between the hours,
a bit between my teeth, a bruising saddle
on my back.

Like a packcamel in desert terrain,
I will ride, the load of existence
upon my camel's hump, the print
of my hoof in the sand.

...but a wind
can erase my mark, a gale blowing
inland, or a storm.

No hoof's ink may be written
on the sandy dust of this world, no hoof,
cloven or human,
to declare I was here:

that I walked
with another's pack upon my back,
without water for days,
my face bridled with leather.

My shadow is here in the midday sun,
my bridled shadow in the desert sand.

V

The black sun of death
sinks into sky's atavistic dome, where
I stand, invisible to all
but that black judge, mocked
by my nothingness.

This phantom and I,
ignorant, shadowless,
packcamel by day, creature
of moon by night.

Locked,
between these hours' iron bars.
sunlight is divested from me.

I, who dream
of being a riderless unicorn,
at sea's edge where the moon is high.

I, who should wear
stars on my wrist, flowers
on my forehead. I,
who should sing like birds,
and like them, fly.

I, who believe in emerald forests,
sapphire skies, ruby rocks, silver seas;
in opal skies, jade stems, coral sea-roses,
rockplants of ivory
curled
within her seabreasts, her hairy forests.
Jadegreen seaweeds making mermaids' hair
by moonlight.

I who believe in the magical moonrock.

In faeries in dresses of aether.

In the noble prince on a fine horse.

In flowers which converse.

In plants that whisper.

I who believe in the jewelled existence:
sunlight's gold upon each finger,
diamond-spray waterfalls on rock.
The mink coat upon the mink.
The jewelled emeralds of the tiger's eyes.
Rainbows after rain.

VI

I sailed upon a Persian rug of dreams,

now sold.

in the marketplace,
without my song,  
or name.  

Ah poems of invisible authors!  

How many years in the weaving,  
this pattern of dreams?  

Where, the tightwoven self  
buried beneath the counter?  

You spend ten thousand on my design.  
You spend five.  

You admire my motifs.  

Can you explain their weft, their warps?  

VII  

Death is a lonely shadow flickering  
through the night. A lonely passage  
between birth and beyond.  
Secret nightmare.  

O song of my voicelessness.  

Song in the sand  

VIII  

Landscape of nightmares  
city of skyscrapers,  
treeless and flowerless city -  
city without children.  

What has become of persian dreams,  
their neat emblematic borders,  
their central motifs?  

Bloody splatters stare at me,  
the steely knife twisted in the stomach,  
the bloodied machete wielded in hate.  

Guns smoke.  

Muggers
and their hates
await knife or bullet, or both.

Victim reproduces victim by default.

IX

into the real world I come
with my muscles pumped
so you may drain me

with my hands polished, shining,
my feet ready.

into the real world I come
with the hurt in the bone
the agony in the flesh
the vacuous eyes of hours
the feral teeth of the air.

with my coffee and my coffeebreaks.

with my madness at nine, my dash at five.

into the heat of subways, that fester
in my brain.

into mugging at gunpoint
on a night I am most high.

into the rape of the defenceless

into the lies and into the theft.
BUSH DIE-DIE

76
ANNIE
by GILLIAN HOWIE

Annie Benjamin née Annie Sterling:
Born May 1901 in English Harbour, Antigua,
Died 12th December 1986 in Cedar Grove, Antigua.

August 1983

Annie came today calling 'Maaa'. My whole family have a special place in their hearts for Annie - 82 years old and still trundling her little cart from Cedar Grove to Hodges Bay. Her cart is full of a variety of vegetables, most of them rotten. I'm sure Annie must get the cast offs that other vendors cannot sell as she is too old now to go down to the wharf to make her selection. Annie has been selling local fruit and vegetables in our area for well over twenty years. For years she came with her donkey 'Harris' (Horace) and at one stage it was Annie, 'Harris' and 'Harris's' foal. But eventually Harris became too much for Annie to manage and she was given or sold to family and Annie got her little cart.

Annie lives on a pension of EC$35.00 a month - paid to her as a war widow; her husband fought in the World War. She has no children of her own and all her brothers and sisters are dead. She had a piece of land in St. John's which she sold and bought a piece of land in Cedar Grove where she built a one room wooden house. Although she had no children she looked after many of her nieces and nephews. Her favourite niece, Mary, married young and had three children. Then Mary's husband decided to go to Aruba where he'd been offered a good job on an oil rig. Within a few days of his arrival in Aruba he was killed in an explosion on the rig. Mary was notified but by the time she got a passport and got to Aruba her husband was already buried. While still in Aruba Mary's mother (Annie's sister) died in Antigua of a heart attack. She came back to bury her mother. Some time later Mary re-married and had three children by her second husband. Tragedy struck again when her husband was killed in a car crash at Friars Hill leaving her penniless with six children. It was then Annie gave Mary piece of her land at Cedar Grove and a two room wooden house was built on it for Mary and her six children.

Annie also looked after Mary's brother (her nephew) who had become mentally ill after his mother died. However he became worse and worse and was put into the mental home.

Mary is now dead and her brother is out of the mental home and is claiming Annie's house and land as his own and is trying to get Annie put into Fiennes Institute (the Old People's Home).

In the last few years the Government built a two room concrete house for Annie to replace her one room wooden house which was on the verge of collapse and she is proud of her new house. There is no running
water or electricity but Annie does not seem to miss these things as she has never had either and I doubt she would be able to pay water and electricity rates. Her water is stored in a rain barrel at the side of the house and cooking is done on her coal pot.

**June 18th, 1984**

Annie came today. She no longer pushes the cart as it is a long way for her to walk and some months ago we told her not to bring vegetables but please to visit regularly and we give her a monthly allowance. On the way here she picks different kinds of bush for her tea and always gets some limes from our lime tree when it's bearing. She was using an old piece of wood as a walking stick and I replaced it with a nice smooth piece Skene had in his room. She told us that she has left her house to a nephew who lives in St. Maarten and who has promised to return and give her a good funeral when she dies. Annie often gives news of people in our area. While she was sitting having her drink of juice she told me that when she was walking past St. Hilaire's house she saw someone clearing the bush in front of the gate (the house has been overgrown and deserted for years) and wanted to ask him if he was St. Hilaire's son — "but mistress I too embarrass to ask the gentleman after what I did. You know one thing I fraid too bad is cattle and the way I walk bend over now I suddenly see two cattle hoof in front my eye so I hit out with my stick ... and shout "MOVE OFF! GET AWAY FROM ME!" When I look up I see a gentleman looking down at me. Like he wearing those shoes with a white piece of rubber across the front ..." by this time I was laughing and Annie was laughing too.

We found out later that the St. Hilaire's had just returned with their son and his wife and are busy putting the house back in shape.

**June 27th, 1984**

Annie came today. She still has the good stick of Skene’s I gave her. She told me she had seen the same gentleman by St. Hilaire’s house and had apologised to him for the episode last week - “mistress I tell him I too sorry for the way I treated him but he must excuse me because I thought he was cattle.”

Sometime in late 1985 I started visiting Annie once a month bringing her the family allowance as the walk to our house had got too much for her. I would sit on her sofa (an old car seat) and we always had a chat. Annie loves to tell stories of her childhood.

**June, 28th 1986**

Today I went to see Annie bringing some Ovaltine and her monthly
allowance. She told me this story from her childhood in Falmouth, English Harbour....

“My mother die when I very young and my stepmother she don’t treat us good at all so all the children leave home, but I too young to leave so I stay right there and my father don’t pay no attention.

One day my brother pay us a visit and when he go back to where he staying he tell my older brother ‘You better go and take Annie away or she go die right where she is.’ My brother came down to English Harbour and he take me back with him to my aunty who live by where the old cemetery used to be. A few of my brothers and sisters already were staying with she. (The old cemetery was by the entrance to Deep Water Harbour).

Every morning before coalpot light Aunty get we down on we knee on the floor and she open the Bible and read to us. She tell we ‘All of you who understand what I am reading — remember — and if you don’t understand yet — listen — because this is the word of God I am reading.’ And every night before we lay down we head we get down on knee again and listen as Aunty read God’s word and try to remember. Also we say Our Father together.

One day my father came to take me back with him to English Harbour, but I do not want to go back and Aunty would not let him take me. She say I am not going from her house and my father tell she he going to bring Police for she.

Well some time after that my father came back with two police to take me back with him. I hang onto Aunty dress while Police ask she question after question and then bring out a big book with lines and give Aunty a pen and she have to write in plenty different parts of this book. Then the Police tell my father that he cannot take me ‘Because the child want to stay with she aunty’ and my aunty has signed on to take care of me.

Well, time pass and one day when I reach about twelve years old, a man came up from English Harbour to tell us that my father Is dying and he wish to see his children to ask forgiveness before he dies. My aunt sit in front of me and she tell me that all this time she would not let my father have me because he treat me too bad, but now the time has come when I must go and see my father.

She help me to dress in my church clothes and tell me the way to English Harbour is not difficult — that once I get to the gates of St. John’s the road goes in a straight line from there. I leave home about twelve o’clock. Sometimes I running, sometimes I walking, and I reach English Harbour about five o’clock.

My father was lying there in his house. His woman was not with him - she was in the village talking with friends. He hold my hand and start to cry and ask if I was really Annie his daughter. I tell him yes. He say he want to ask my forgiveness and the forgivenesss of all his children for the way he treat us when we were very young - ‘Annie, do you forgive me?’ he ask. ‘Yes father I forgive you,’ I say to him.

Then he sigh and roll over on his side and he say ‘Annie, get a cloth and clean your father.’ Poor man, I lift his shirt and I see his body covered
August 31st, 1986

Today I went to see Annie with her allowance and a few things - ovaltine, sardines, condensed milk, corn beef, biscuits, limes and some dog food for her dog. Annie has not been feeling well these past few weeks — the cloudy weather affects her arthritis. She says the Doctor gave her a prescription — but the Dispensary has no medicine at this time. Her great nephew came in to see her while I was there. His name is Gavin. I stayed with Annie for a while and Annie talked to me about her husband.

Harry Benjamin was born in Sea View Farm. His mother and father were married but his father did not spend much time at home. When he was in his teens he got into trouble with his Church Minister, a Moravian, who was very strict with the young people and if he did not approve of the way they were behaving during the week he would admonish them in his Sunday sermon and sometimes they would have to stay in after service for a caning with 'the big stick'. The Church Minister was an Antiguan, born in New Winthropes and sent to Sea View Farm after he was ordained.

Mrs Benjamin was very upset when her son was given a caning one Sunday and said "No one ever going to beat my picknee again," and packed a bag for him and sent him to work on the boats so that he could see the world.

Harry went to sea and was in Panama when the 1st World War started. He was asked to join the British Army and his mother received papers from the War Office asking permission for her son to sign on. She signed the papers and sent them back, feeling very proud of Harry. By then she was high up in the Moravian Church and everyone knew her as 'Ma Pinch'. So Harry Benjamin joined the British Army and fought for them in the 1st World War.

Annie had not yet met him. She was only seventeen in 1918 when Victory was declared and says she will never forget the day.

They woke up to church bells ringing everywhere — clang a lang, clang a lang, and when they went outside they saw a car driving by with its horn blowing and a little while later another car with its horn blowing. "In those days there was only a very few cars in Antigua and no planes at all and yet on this day I think all the cars in Antigua drive into St. John's with horn blowing and all the while church bells ringing - clang a lang, clang a lang. Everybody gather in the streets to find out what is happening and then someone came running up the road shouting to all of us — "WE DONE WIN THE WAR," and we all felt very excited and happy."

The celebrations continued throughout the day and that night there was a big fireworks display on Otto's Hill (now Michael's Mount).
Everyone had gathered to see the fireworks and the display started well with all eyes looking into the sky at the showers of stars - when suddenly a rocket misfired into the huge box containing all the fireworks and there was a loud explosion with all the rockets taking off in different directions.

Many people were badly burnt, among them Annie. She spent a month in hospital and then went home, but it took her over a year to recover completely and the scars were with her for the rest of her life.

It was a couple of years later that Annie met Harry Benjamin when he came back to Antigua and joined the Police Force. They fell in love and got married but she says Harry was not a good husband to her. A real roamer who 'lived out' with other women and did not support her in any way.

Eventually she left him and went back to her aunt where she made a living by making coalpots and selling them.

One day she got a message telling her to come to the hospital because her husband was ill. He'd had a stroke while riding on his donkey. Annie went to see him but says, "He was already travelling to death and could not recognise me." He died a few days later.

Although he had a house and land it was taken over by his parents and Annie got nothing. His parents told Annie that he had 'drunk out' his house and land.

November 21st, 1986

Annie is now bedridden and she is dying. I feel depressed and sad over the poverty she has lived in all her life and the hardships she's endured. For someone like me who is accustomed to all the basic comforts of life, living in the poverty of Annie would be worse than death. I doubt I would survive very long. To Annie who has known nothing better since birth that way of life was normal and as she got older and bought her own piece of land and had her concrete house built for her by Government life did get better and Annie was proud of it. Annie is not a morose person and must have experienced many happy times but now when I visit her with some basic things to make life easier I still feel very helpless in this little house with no furniture except a bed, two small tables heaped up with odd bottles, pieces of cloth and this, that and the other, and the old car seat with broken springs. The walls are blackened from months of cooking inside the house on the coalpot - there are no curtains; an old, torn dress covers part of the window. I know Annie does not want to move from the house she loves so much but she is now helpless and there is never anyone here when I visit and everything is soiled. I do not know where to start. I have given her neighbour Ruby some gifts for herself and asked her at the same time if she could visit Annie three times a day for me, just to give her a drink and light the kerosene lamp at night and we have sent a message to her family (nephews and nieces) to ask if we can bring in some members of the St.Vincent de Paul Society to help us clean the house and bathe Annie.
I see a lot of soiled clothes piled up in different bundles on the floor but do not want to remove them in case among the different bundles may be some treasured possessions of Annie.

November 24th, 1986

I visited Annie today to find there had been a complete transformation in her house. I could hardly believe my eyes. The house had been swept and scrubbed, all the soiled bundles of clothes had disappeared and now there was a lovely old hat/coat stand in the corner and hanging on it was an umbrella and a ladies coat. The old car seat was still against the wall but now it was covered with a clean bedspread and even had a cushion placed on it; against the other wall was one of Annie’s small carved wooden tables with a tin of Ovaltine and an enamel cup on it.

I went into Annie’s room. Annie was lying on the bed on her side and did not seem to recongnise me. She was murmuring to herself. The bed (an old four-poster) had been made up with clean linen and a clean cotton blanket (one that Mum gave Annie years ago) was tucked in over her feet. There was a clean pillow-case on the pillow. Annie herself looked washed and clean. For the first time there were curtains over the bedroom windows. The curtains were blowing in the breeze and sunlight came through the window and across the edge of the bed. Beside the bed was the other wooden table and on it was a thermos of hot ovaltine and a covered water container with a clean enamel cup beside it.

I sat on the bed beside Annie and said a prayer of thanks while I held her hand and looked at our old friend. She seemed thirsty so I opened a packet of apple juice, put a straw in it and Annie drank almost all of it. She can no longer eat anything solid. I talked to Annie for a while and although Annie did not talk her eyes seemed to understand. I told her how much all her friends in Hodges Bay loved her and missed her and how we all remembered her coming to us with ‘Harris’ and how each week we’d forward to her arrival and Annie smiled - the first smile I’d seen in a long time. I’d brought some limes with me as I remembered how Annie loved limes and always asked for them. When she saw the limes she pointed to them and then to her head, so I rubbed her head gently with one half of a lime. While I was still there Annie’s great niece came in to check on her and her neighbour told me that Annie’s parish priest was coming to give her communion the next day. Annie is Church of England.

I never saw Annie again, but early in the morning of December 12th I dreamt that Mum had come with me to visit Annie and with us had come a man who was a stranger to me. I tried to see him clearly because in my dream I was puzzled as to why he was with us but his face always seemed turned away from me. Mum and I and this stranger went into the house and there, standing in front of us was Annie, dressed in a bright, flowered dress and looking very well. Her face had filled out and she was smiling. Mum held my arm and said, ‘Gillie, Annie is getting better’. Then Annie walked past us, through the front door, down the steps and started
walking down the road without looking back.

I half woke up, turned over and said to myself, ‘What a relief-
Annie is getting better’.

On the day of the funeral I was ill with a very bad stomach pain
and could not attend but heard that it was very well attended and the
nephew to whom she’d left the house had arrived from St. Maarten with
two lovely wreaths and had made all the funeral arrangements and all her
nieces and nephews were there.

A.J.SEYMOUR

FOLK SONG

Supenaam water sweet, son
But Supenaam water deep, son
And you got to paddle more
Or else you got to sleep, son
The deep long sleep and sure.

Itanime water strange, son
And Itanime waters change, son
Watch for the river roar.
Itanime took a score, son
And hungers still for more, son
Itanime water danger, son
Some people go ashore.

Itanime rocks are sharp, son
And Itanime waters dark, son
Dark like a danger door.
Let the Captain drop a trick, son
The Belly-Boat rips so quick, son
You drown in it for sure.

Supenaam water sweet, son
Itanime water sharp, son
So once and never more.
TO THE FAMILY HOME AWAITING REPAIR

Oh, long narrow home heavy with living
An age of memories people the walls
Around your naked frame,

Warm shell of love & crowding children
Where the young girls in uniform
Hats worn like horseguards
Speech full of the school diction
Cycle up to ask for who's at home.

And the cool Trade Winds carry echoes
Pavan for A Dead Princess
Played on the Thorens
Until it wore the grooves.

The scent of roses in the slim garden
Growing in the four-hour overhead sun
Smell of bread from the oven
Everything mingling in the wind.

The tales we told around the dining table
Linking the luncheons with their spell
(Sometimes the battlefield for table tennis).

The statue of JT at the desk
Image of the dedicated student.
The stairs are torn away that quivered to the steps
Impatient for games & parties but slow for school.

So many came here - tea-visiting professors,
Exam students, poets, novelists, sculptors,
A Chief Justice - a future Prime Mininster
Once talked halfway through the night.

Through a hole in the hooded verandah
The bats spelt six o'clock evening patrol.

And little children to the kindergarden
Wrestling their way into the hall of learning
Chattering, tormenting the wild cherry-tree
That always yields its fruit.

Oh, crowd your long years of memory
Into a prayer for their future
For all who lived & loved & studied here.
McDONALD DASH

MANHATTAN NOONDAY

I sat in my Calvin Kleins
adjusted my Benetton sweater
and contemplated Fifth Avenue
Like a trapped tourist
on a bench in Central Park S.

Takes a hell of a lot
of patience
to live in New York

Manhattan - My island
in the sun

Up from the "E" train
In Reeboks stepping sturdily
at 53rd and Lex
Pushing inward through the
fabric of the Big City.

Heading to Midtown and late
for work past Charlie's Corner
Hard by Florsheims and
Bloomie's

Moving aside to let
old ladies
with autographed varicoses
through multitude
of hot-dog-and-Haagen-Daaz-
chocolate break
half pound of David's
cookies in Gucci handbags
The big city pauses in the
Manhattan noonday.

Prince skirts swish by

Standing by newstand perusing
People - Hustler - Business Week
Plunking dime and a
quarter for a USA Today.

The Big City throbs as
Matrons waddle into
Petrossian's for turtle-loaves

85
at olympian prices

Tell their story to their
friends in the Hamptons

Manhattan - my island

Dense jungle of concrete
and steel
looking at Mr Trump's tower
Black
Up to the blue sky.

Gazing across at
Bergdorf Goodman's
where price-asking
is a presumption
A 14th Street refrain

Where is Herman's Sporting Goods?
Oh! Down Third by FDR'S
postal facility - (how I
love these New York words)
gorging out of Cinema II
After a spider woman kissed me

New York
New York
in the noonday

Cross over to West side
in the M-28
Alight at the Henry Hudson
To look in on old Mrs Nissenbaum
large lady in small apt.
And nasturtiums stand in the
window sill

Manhattan - survivor's song
My island in the Big City
Puts on its Ferraris
in the Noonday.
Wilson Harris’s *The Infinite Rehearsal* is the most recent work in what is already a remarkable bildungsroman. It begins with a 'renegade' note from the protagonist, 'Robin Redbreast Glass,' complaining that:

W.H. has stolen a march on me and put his name to my fictional autobiography. So be it. I do not intend to sue him for my drowned rights. Call it character licence on his part. He and I are adversaries, as my book will show, but we share one thing in common, namely, an approach to the ruling concepts of civilization from the other side... (p.vii)

The note is a reminder that Harris, as author, refuses to be authoritarian in his approach to character or text, abandoning conventions of realism, authorial omniscience or artistic detachment. The author enters into the narrative, becoming a 'character' in his own fiction, admitting to his own biases. Later on in the book, Glass, who serves as the reflection (rather than simply a transparent device) of his author, challenges him on the accuracy of his facts:

'May I give you the facts?' said W.H. 'I may be a character in your book but still...'

'Facts?' said I.

'You - Robin Glass - your mother Alice, your aunt Miriam, and three children were drowned in June 1961, the afternoon of the earthquake. The boat Tiger over-turned at sea...'

'It's not true', 'I shouted. 'You know damn well I was in bed with flu at aunt Miriam's.'

'It was I,' said W.H. gently.

'You?' (pp. 47/48)

The 'autobiography' touches intimately both author and character. Aunt Miriam, who runs a children's school of drama in her home, is drowned along with several children, when their boat capsizes in a storm during an outing. Alice, Robin's mother (the father has long deserted), a literate, intelligent and brave woman, is herself drowned attempting rescue. Robin, ill in bed at his aunt's home, hears the news from his childhood friends, the orphans Peter and Emma, whom Alice had managed to save. From these slight ingredients, a visionary 'rehearsal' of events takes place in the child's fevered brain, deeply affecting his view of the real world. Catastrophe is converted into creative insight. Not only has the child been exposed (at aunt Miriam's) to a world of 'magical theatre' where 'the histories of the world' are re-enacted through 'the shoestring budget of childhood theatre' (p. 65); but he has also been influenced by stories of his eccentric, bookish grandfather who has 're-written' Goethe's Faust while 'pork-knocking' (prospecting for gold and diamonds) in the rainforests of his own 'Sacred Wood' where he dies of beri-beri on the day Robin is born, the same day the nuclear bomb is
dropped on Hiroshima '... and history changed, revised itself backwards, never to be the same again.' (p.12)

The awareness of childhood deprivation and global turbulence (conveyed with great power and economy as the simultaneous trauma of childbirth and nuclear devastation) imbues Glass with the conviction that he has been charged by the Creative Spirit (a 'revision' of the ghost's charge to Hamlet, 'the glass of fashion', to seek revenge) to embark upon 'the ceaseless rehearsal, ceaseless performance of the play of truth,' in which the Self is 'fictionalised' as a means of locating the creative imagination within 'ageless author, ageless character.' (p.82)

Like his grandfather, he becomes 'gravedigger/pork-knocker' in the 'Sacred Wood' (a rather more humble role than Eliot/Frazer's priest/poet):

The graves I dug were libraries of myths of gold, silver, bone ... texts that broke a uniform narrative domination by the conquistadores of history in inserting themselves into my book despite the apparent eclipse they endured, despite voicelessness or oblivion. (p.2)

Classical and modern texts of European civilization are subjected to a 'panning' by the author as 'pork-knocker' in 'a library of dreams', and made to yield up their correspondences with other, 'lost' or unregarded cultures. The result is a novel-amalgam in which bits of the 'revised' texts are embedded within a rich magma of cross-cultural, universal significance. Tiresias, the seer, for example, now observes things from within a third world perspective, 'like a tourist under a black sky'. The other side of the Great Tradition appears.

I saw the negative film of Thebes ... I saw Napoleon's negative crown and Alexander's sceptre and Captain Cat's tombstone floating with Alice's ring and with the stone from a Jamaican hillside ... It was an uncanny vortex. The flotsam and jetsam of empires! (p.72/73)

The idea of fiction as a continual rehearsal or 're-vision' of accepted traditions (including the art of fiction itself), was already present in Harris's early work. In a 1967 lecture he described it like this:

It is as if within his work [the writer] sets out again and again across a certain territory... of broken recollection in search of a community or species of fiction whose existence he begins to discern. ('The Writer and Society', in Tradition, The Writer and Society New Beacon 1967)

That technique of 'rehearsal' is at the root of all his work from The Palace of the Peacock (1960) onward, and the overwhelming concern is with avoiding the 'sovereign', absolute nature of Tradition, or the tyranny of 'hard fact'. His use of Classical myth and allegory, or of the European literary tradition, is part of a process of re-interpreting or 'retrieving' values that have become ossified, their links with other, so-called 'primitive' cultures, lost. In the unlocking of those 'sovereign' traditions, there is a release of potential energy for creative change.

...my grandfather's Faust (which he wrote or brought to
completion in the year I was born) possesses roots as much in the modern age as in the Columbian workshop of the gods and therefore addresses a European myth from a multi-faceted and partly non-European standpoint. (p.7)

Robin Redbreast Glass, in writing his 'autobiography', is aware of this 'pre-natal text' which, like Goethe's lifelong work, mirrors its author's own sense of involvement in a drama of consciousness in which final vision is never achieved. Faust appears as a central text in the novel, but the figure of Faust, brought alongside the modern age, revises his perspectives:

'You know, Robin, ... I like to think of my surgery as a window upon heaven. Except that heaven's changing. ... technology's changing. And quite frankly I'm not sure what investitures the devil now wears.' (p.64)

In fact, Faust now sees with 'Quetzalcoatl eyes in which were entwined the marriage of heaven and earth' (p.64) The reference to the Aztec 'plumed serpent', the god uniting aetherial and earthly life, also conjures up Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, with its plea for a wedding of physical and spiritual 'contraries'.

For Harris, as for William Blake (whose prophetic books with their airborne, energetic figures Harris's work often calls to mind), without contraries is no progression; and the novel, both 'autobiography' and 'fiction,' is also organised on this principle. Glass, both fictional character and author, is in dialogue with the 'Erdgeist' of a 'Faustian' world:

Thus it was that I welcomed Ghost, conquistadorial and victimised Ghost (was <s>he male/female? I could not tell) when IT appeared on a beach in Old New Forest ... (p.1)

The Faust/Mephisto dialogue is expanded, however, to include political tyranny, ballot-rigging in the 'third world', the refugee problem, the commercialisation of Space, the Challenger disaster, Chernobyl: Don't exaggerate. Chernobyl is a disaster complex in the Soviet Union. What has it got to do with the free West and the choices that lie before the electorates of the free West? 'Hush-hush disaster, dateless day bearing' said Ghost. 'When Communist Rome burns an empire of souls inhales its ash. But no one sees the fire or the brute faery at our fingertips......Cheap energy is the opium of the masses, the new lotus.' (p.54)

In his previous novel, *Carnival* (1985), Harris had used the allegorical densities of Dante's *Divina Commedia* as a 'text' through which his imaginative, cross-cultural vision ranges, picking up Mediaeval threads of meaning and connecting them to contemporary, but broken, lines of communication, rather like a lone linesman in a disaster area where most of the power lines are down. In this 'repair work,' post-colonial cultural fragmentation and the resultant masks of carnival are linked with the social and political corruption and consequent need for spiritual guidance in Dante's 14th century Europe. The 'guides' in Harris's novels are culturally heterogeneous, modern figures, but their
roles are the same: to re-establish the inner authority of unconditional love in genuine revolutionary change. The last sentence of Carnival begins with the last line of the Paradiso:

\[\text{The love that moves the sun and the other stars.}\]
\[\text{('...l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.'})\]

The Infinite Rehearsal, like Carnival, like much of Harris's fiction, is not so much a 're-reading' as a 're-visioning' of European Myth (itself concerned with the retrieval of Value), in order to discover the deeper springs of the enabling Universal Truth that all myth contains. It was, Harris argues, the enshrining of the great myths as 'Sovereign Tradition' which, in a sense, created the 'third world' and broke the lines of communication between peoples and their cultures; a disruption that now appears on a global scale. Goethe's Faust serves as another Great Myth which, since its origins lie even deeper, within an 'Ur-text' or myth of the divorce between Reason and Emotion, may have resonances that suggest and reveal:

... a play that is infinite rehearsal... that approaches again and again a sensation of ultimate meaning residing within a deposit of ghosts relating to the conquistadorial body - as well as the victimised body - of new and old worlds, new forests old forests, new stars and old constellations within the work-shop of the gods. (p.1)

This is, in fact, a description of Harris's own fictional practice, where the writer 'sets out again and again across a certain territory ...', but without any preconceived destination, open to 'revisionary strategies' available to the creative imagination. This is what Goethe's Faust means when he tells the Erdgeist that he needs help in order to leave 'dabbling in words' and seek to discover 'what holds the world together.' In Harris's novel, Ghost acts as Geist to Glass/Harris's quest:

I say revisionary strategies to imply that as you write... of the dead or the unborn, bits of the world's turbulent universal consciousness embed themselves in your book.

Do you see? (p.46)

'And I revise around these and through these. I see', 'W.H.'/Glass replies. It is a method of 'validation of fiction', going against the grain of conventional form and practice, the author becoming involved in the fiction, following where the work (Geist) leads while also engaged in the writing.

Above all, this is a novel about the prophetic nature of fiction as a means of apprehending the dilemmas of our post-colonial civilization involving traumatised 'Third Worlds' as well as bewildered 'First Worlds'. The 'spectre of wholeness' that underlies the strange, rambling narrative lies in the hidden densities of the texts themselves, where there is a visionary thread of meaning running through them into a seamless, cross-cultural garment. Extracts from T.S. Eliot, Walter De la Mare, Dylan Thomas, W.H.Auden, Wilfred Owen, R.L.Stevenson, Robert Burns, Karl Marx and Shakespeare appear at odd moments within the narrative, often altered slightly, the result of cultural frisson. The texts jostle each other, share in each other's meanings:
'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller, Knocking at the moonlit door. 

Belly to belly 
Back to back 
Ah don't give a damn 
Ah done dead a'ready. 

And I Tiresias haveforesuffered all 
I who sat by Thebes below the wall 
And walked among the lowest of the dead. 

At first sight, De La Mare's simple ballad, a relic of school days, and Eliot's classical allusions from *The Waste Land* seem to be joined by an unlikely bedfellow: the bawdy Caribbean folksong, 'Jumbie Jamboree'. But the folksong with its despairing echo of the cramped hold of the slave-ship, becomes a mediating comment on both De La Mare's Traveller, unaware of a 'host of phantom listeners', and the Waste Land with its expiatory message for a historical and cultural Tradition in crisis. The Great Tradition was always (as Conrad saw) deeply implicated in the Imperial Adventure which served to support that Tradition. The texts gain a new 'immediacy of utterance' from their juxtaposition. 

Harris is making a plea for world sanity; for the compassionate understanding denied by crude polarisations of language and thought. The novel is part of a profoundly moral undertaking; an attempt to understand the apparent paradoxes of remarkable human achievement in science and art alongside the equally remarkable record of human misery and deprivation. Instead of merely investing in the 'human interest' of these paradoxes, Harris looks within, at our own biases, our own failure to 'connect' because of an 'illiteracy of the imagination' which obscures the link between material progress and increasing violence in a world dominated by the stock-market mentality of 'Billionaire Death' (one of the allegorical figures which rise out of Aunt Miriam's children's theatre). The hope for the future is Emma, who, in becoming the first female Archbishop, witnesses to a new *Divina Commedia*: a 'Divine Communism,' a reversal of the bankruptcy of the human imagination which has led to the collective death-wish inherent in global violence, drug-trafficking, environmental rape and the spectre of nuclear destruction. It is to her that Glass/Harris sets out on his final journey. 

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"THEATRE IN THE CARIBBEAN" BY KEN CORSBIE

A REVIEW by AL CREIGHTON

The importance of a major publication on Caribbean Theatre at any time is considerable since the field is markedly underdeveloped in the area of published literature. The total collective of documentation, critical works, analyses and even published plays is much too slim for a region that has produced so much theatre. Critical attention in this area, as well as publications generally, has certainly lagged well behind that given to poetry and fiction and, partly for this reason, any work of some merit is welcome as a necessary advancement upon an unsatisfactory situation.


The list is quite nearly exhausted by the above and so, an account of Caribbean theatre, such as Ken Corsbie's Theatre in the Caribbean (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1984; 58; vi pp.) written by one whose familiarity with his subject has spanned several years as actor and director, may be looked upon as being extremely valuable. But Corsbie's work disappoints, falling short of expectations and turning out to be limited in achievement for many reasons; not because it confines its aim, at best, to the middle forms in secondary school, but because its content is too often cursory treatments of very important issues, conversational rather than analytical, wants thoroughness in a number of areas of research, and is often erroneous.

The book is meritorious and useful for its recognition of many areas in which theatre is alive in the Caribbean, and is particularly progressive in its acknowledgement of the oral arts in which Corsbie appears to be particularly interested. He very necessarily draws attention to the importance of orality and of its traditions to the region's drama, but his definitions/concepts of drama and theatre are rather too promiscuously all-embracing and his tendency is to describe phenomena that are merely marginally theatrical as drama without the often needed qualification.

Starting probably from a broad notion of "all the world's a stage" and all action of man as theatre/theatrical/dramatic, he proceeds with an all-embracing readiness to admit varied forms of spontaneity, probably reflecting a belief in the misconceived cliche that "Caribbean people are natural actors/singers/dancers". He asserts:

The historical backgrounds of the islands with their mixtures of strong folk cultures and traditions, have blessed us with very expressive
dialects and body languages.

An assumption there is that something makes Caribbean dialects more effective and "expressive" than other languages, but any native speaker anywhere can claim equal efficiency in his language. What is true in the remark is that the backgrounds have indeed created rich material for theatrical forms, sources and inspiration, not that they have given rise to superior languages or gesture.

Such stereotyped notions might also have led Corsbie into some of the errors in the work. He is careful enough to add that:

natural talents and exciting roots
are not enough to make excellent actors. It takes a good deal of
hard work, intelligence and discipline
.... many Caribbean actors ....
have mastered the necessary skills

But he never gets around to telling readers what the skills are or how they may be acquired/sharpened. Both are important since the book's aim is instruction at a fundamental level. He lists qualities possessed by some of the region's leading performers, perhaps in an attempt to fulfil that role, but all the attributes listed often remain physical/personal qualities; at best the raw material or what one sees in the finished product. "A powerful voice", "physical and personal power and vitality", "a natural warmth", "tall handsome athletic physique" and "a spontaneous sense of humour" seem to suggest natural physical gifts rather than skills that one can work at to acquire. This neither supports Corsbie's own earlier argument nor leads us in the right direction.

One still needs to know what makes Joy Ryan "just beautiful to watch in any role" or what gives Louise Bennett "attention-getting stage presence". The student is not told how to achieve any of these. The belief in 'natural talent' also affects the kinds of questions he poses at the ends of chapters, such as:

Is there a student in your class
who can always tell a good story?
Are you a good actor yourself?

which is of limited usefulness in skills acquisition/development and keeps the emphasis on possession of natural ability.

Corsbie misunderstands the art of dub poetry and is thus misleading as he asserts:

Dub poetry could be easy. With a
background of reggae rhythm from
your class mates, just tell of some-
thing in your own life.

That is hardly likely to produce poetry. Far from being spontaneous/ex-tempo composition, dub poetry is a more complex craft involving techniques of scribal structure and oral performance. Neither was American soul/funk "rap" a pioneering influence for dub poetry as he suggests. This form, which developed in the 1970's, pre-dates rap which reached its height at the beginning of the 1980's. Dub poetry is also vaguely related to DJ Dub performances with which Corsbie seems to
confuse it but even DJ virtuosity dates back to the 1960's.

Further, when Corsbie shows his consciousness of skills for which actors have to be trained he is, again, less than instructive, as in the question

What techniques do you think are needed to be a good actor? Do you know any of your friends who have some of those skills? Perhaps they, too, will make top-class Caribbean actors some day.

The answer to the first question is not quite that subjective. One cannot assume that a student without the necessary technical knowledge can think out these answers, but rather, he has to be taught them.

For most of the book, one gets brief, introductory references to sources, dramatists and productions which rarely get beyond generalization and superficial description. A wide range of subjects are approached without being addressed and, indeed, these are so varied that they could hardly have been properly covered in one book of this length and range. It is likely, though, that the book aims only to sensitize and to stimulate debate and further research through the questions it poses but does not answer.

Corsbie is consistent in his very progressive approach to theatre and is fully aware of the vitality of oral traditions. But one is left with the impression of an insufficiency and thinness in the research and attention to detail which led to many mis-quotes of lyrics and incorrect information about performers (for example, "The Rivers of Babylon" which is really a Melodians creation), as well as unscientific conclusions.

A major strength of Theatre in the Caribbean is that it does not treat drama as a purely literary discipline but more progressively recognizes it as "action", paying due attention to its technical/practical aspects. Such an approach is superior to what usually happens in school/exam situations where drama is treated no differently to literature. Corsbie's design of activities and exercises at the end of each chapter forces the introduction of those aspects of theatre into the school curriculum.

It is understandable that stimuli are being provided for the students to think more about theatre and relate various relevant issues to it. Though sometimes a little short on real information, the style used is more beneficial than any attempt to provide information through straight expository prose.

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