

KYK- OVER- AL

39

DECEMBER, 1988



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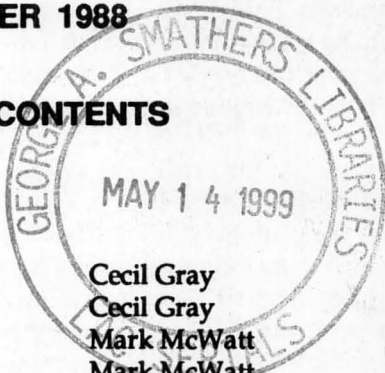
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The Editors would welcome the submission of poems, short stories, articles and reviews to consider for publication. Publication of course cannot be guaranteed and because of expense it will not be possible to return manuscripts. Submissions may be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

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ACROSS THE EDITOR'S DESK

Demerara Publishers

The last two issues of *Kyk*, Nos. 37 and 38, and this issue, No. 39, were designed and typeset by Demerara Publishers Limited. This involvement with that new Company marks a significant stage in the life of the magazine.

In recent years there has been a sad decline in book-publishing in Guyana. At the same time lack of foreign exchange has cut the supply of imported books to a trickle. The resulting readers' drought has coincided with the coming of Television. Guyana is well on its way to becoming a nation where the young will have no taste for books. The impact on literacy and educational standards is apparent and the situation is worsening. Those concerned must do what they can. A few have formed Demerara Publishers as a non-profit foundation.

The Company was formed at the end of 1987 to undertake "Desk-top Publishing" in Guyana. It is dedicated to producing and publishing magazines and books (reprints and original work) in Guyana which will be useful in education and which will make a contribution to the history, culture, and literature of the country.

In twelve months progress has been made, considerably assisted by a grant of Can\$50,000 from the Canadian Government. Demerara Publishers has helped in the reprinting of Peter Ruhomon's classic **Centenary History of East Indians in British Guiana**, has assisted in producing the last 3 issues of **Kyk-Over-AI**, and has played a part in the publication of half-a-dozen other publications. Major projects now include the publication of Martin Carter's **Selected Poems** and A.J.Seymour's **Collected Poems**, the production of a History of the Chinese in Guyana, producing a new magazine for creative talent in the oral tradition to be called **Survival** and a magazine for children, and publishing a volume of Sir Sridath Ramphal's speeches. Indeed, the danger already is that the submission of valuable material will overwhelm practicality.

Kyk-Over-AI is pleased to be part of this vigorous effort to renew the availability of good books and magazines in Guyana.

The Saving of Books

It isn't only in Guyana that book-reading is in danger. George Steiner, an outstanding American intellectual, and Joseph Brodsky, winner of the 1987 Nobel Prize for literature, have both made speeches recently warning of the death of books. In many cultures, Steiner points out, the reading of books is neither natural nor native. A lot of the old impulse to write books came from a thirst for immortality which is now felt to be "not only elitist but simply embarrassing". Joseph Brodsky agrees, saying that holding a book in one's hand is a little like fondling an urn already rustling with someone's ashes.

Books, Steiner says, need the sort of private space and silence which is

hardly available any longer. Some 85% of American adolescents "can no longer take in a printed page if their act of reading does not have an accompanying background of electronic noise". Steiner fears that people may revert to listening to words while looking merely at pictures. "The book today," he says, "is antiquarian, as luxurious an instrument as was the illuminated manuscript after Gutenberg".

Joseph Brodsky feels that books have simply become too many. Reading them takes too much time. The answer, he suggests, is to abandon prose and concentrate on poetry which not only teaches "the value of each word" but, above all, "develops in prose that appetite for metaphysics that distinguishes a work of art from mere belles lettres". What the modern reader should do, if his confidence in books is flagging, is to read all the available works of major poetry in his own language in the last century. Within a few months the reader's literary taste will be "in great shape".

The cure George Steiner offers for the reading sickness is much the same. He tells the story of Erasmus, who, "walking home on a foul night, glimpsed a tiny fragment of print in the mire. He bent down, seized it and lifted it to a flickering light with a cry of thankful joy. Here was a miracle!" Steiner hopes that a return of "that sense of the miraculous in the fact of a demanding text"—the virtue, above all, of poetry—may, in the end, be the saving of books.

The Sandberry Press in Jamaica

We are extremely pleased to note the establishment of the Sandberry Press in Jamaica. This new press has announced the first three titles in its Caribbean Poetry Series:

1. **LOGGERHEAD** by Gloria Escoffery.
2. **A TALE FROM THE RAIN FOREST** by Edward Baugh.
3. **JOURNEY POEM** by Pamela Mordecai.

Orders for these books can be sent to DeBrosse, Redman, Black & Co., 8 College Close, Kingston 7, Jamaica, West Indies.

We have received a copy of Gloria Escoffery's **Loggerhead**. Gloria Escoffery is primarily a painter. However, a number of her poems have been published in such anthologies as the two **Caribbean Voices** volumes, **Breaklight**, and, more recently, **The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse** and **Caribbean Poetry Now**. She currently contributes a regular and outstandingly perceptive art column to the **Jamaica Journal**.

Loggerhead is a lovely collection of her very painterly poems—excellently produced by The Sandberry Press. The book is a splendid advertisement for this new and very welcome addition to the Caribbean's publishing arsenal which needs all the augmenting it can possibly get. Readers of *Kyk* and lovers of poetry will, we sincerely hope, buy Sandberry publications as soon as they appear.

Imagination and Poetry

We have been reading an excellent new biography of Alexander Pope by Maynard Mack. In the Preface to his magnificent translation of Homer's *Iliad* Pope writes that imagination, or "invention", lies at the heart of poetry and is the distinctive attribute of genius in all fields.

Homer is universally allow'd to have had the greatest Invention of any Writer whatever ... Nor is it a Wonder if he has ever been acknowledge'd the greatest of Poets, who most excell'd in That which is the very Foundation of Poetry. It is the Invention that in diffeent degrees distinguishes all great Genius's: The utmost Stretch of Human Study, Learning, and Industry, which masters every thing besides, can never attain to this. It furnishes Art with all her Materials, and without it Judgment itself can at best but steal wisely: For Art is only like a prudent Steward that lives on managing the Riches of Nature. Whatever Praises may be given to Works of Judgment, there is not even a single Beauty in them to which the Invention must not contribute.

"I Shake Hands With You In My Heart"

Harry Chambers, editor and director of the publishers Peterloo Poets in England (celebrating the publication of its 100th poetry title on November 29th, 1988), has sent us an article, "Poetry Matters", in which he discusses the triumphs and tribulations of a publisher of poetry. In a concluding passage he sets out what he seeks in poetry:

What I am looking for in poetry is "heart-rending sense" - the phrase was coined by Robert Graves—or the "shiver down the spine" described by A.E.Housman in *The Fame and Nature of Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 1933). These come from an originality of vision and a freshness of language brought to bear upon the most important areas of common human experience. I feel that poetry should make us think more deeply about our lives and our relationships and that it should often, in Philip Larkin's memorable words, "nudge us from comfort". I have a preference for poetry that is in touch with the language of the age. I expect a good poem to move me. Like A.E. Housman and Philip Larkin, I feel that poetry is a matter more of the emotions than the intellect. I have no enthusiasm for too much cleverness or obscurity, unless it is of the kind that Philip Larkin (*Radio Times*, 16th August 1973) called "luminous and wonder-generating obscurity". I am not keen on the poetry equivalent of abstract painting, and I must confess to a liking for poems that are peopled. I think good poems can be complex, operate on many levels, without being difficult.

Leslie Stephen once wrote something like: "The poet's task is to move our hearts by revealing his own, and not to display his learning, or mimic the fine notes of his predecessors ..." Such a magnificent motto—one that Hardy copied out into his notebooks and that Larkin was fond of quoting—is also good enough for me. Good poetry should be accessible to all who can read and have feelings. It should provoke the response of the Old Domestic Servant who found some of William Barnes's poems in a pile of books that she was dusting and wrote to him in 1869: 'Sir, I shook hands with you in my heart, and I laughed and cried by turns'.

That, we believe, is well said.

Offerings

This is an interesting publication which helps to meet the growing need for home-based Guyanese writers in all disciplines to develop forums to express their views and expose their work. There have been two issues of *Offerings* to date—the first published in April, 1987, and the second in November, 1987. The purpose of the magazine is crystallised in the second issue as follows:

The aspiration is to reflect the plural and multi-cultural concerns of the Guyanese society. However, there will be issues that will feature academic and literary works specific to an ethnic or other grouping such as women, professionals, etc. Others, like the present one, will be more general in focus. As suggested by the title, it is the intention of *OFFERINGS* to provide Guyana with popular literature and simultaneously offer writers a responsible vehicle for expression.

Among other items, the second issue of *Offerings* contains poems by the promising Sasenarine Persaud among others, fiction by Rosetta Khalideen, an extract from the unpublished novel 'DEAR DEATH', also by Sasenarine Persaud, and articles by Frank Long on Indigenous Technology, Kampta Karran on Planning, Iris Sukdeo on Hindu Customs, and Roy Brummell on Folk Lore. One point to make is that in future greater care should be taken in binding this magazine. The first two copies of the magazine that we obtained had some pages bound out of sequence and some are completely missing.

Offerings was founded, and is edited and published, by Kampta Karran. Enquiries and contributions should be addressed to: Kampta Karran, *Offerings* Publication, Belle Vue Pilot Scheme, West Bank Demerara, Guyana.

The Cause of Fiction

With his kind permission we reproduce one of Wayne Brown's brilliant contributions to the *Trinidad Express*. This article, which appeared on March 23, 1988, rang a number of bells. Its relevance and appropriateness to writing and writers throughout the West Indies (and further) does not fade.

THE CAUSE OF FICTION

I want to write beautifully, create beautifully, not outside but in this thing in which I am born, in this place where, in the midst of ugly towns, cities, Fords, moving pictures, I have always lived, must always live. I do not want even those old monks at Chartres, building their Cathedrals, to be at bottom any purer than myself.

(Sherwood Anderson)

One of the small but recurring heartbreaks of writing this column is this. Regularly over the past five years (has it really been so long?) young writers have brought their manuscripts to my door for discussion; and to me has fallen the wearying task of initiating them into some of the facts of life, and watching their gaze cloud over, as I talk, with all the depressing D's: doubt, dismay, disappointment, distrust, dislike. Few, so far as I know, have ever left without at least harbouring the suspicion that I was "trying to make them feel small." (Well, I was). None, so far as I know, has ever acquiesced in feeling small enough to actually learn anything—beginning with the notion of service. Indeed, one recent pilgrim left my house, telling me that he found my line-by-line patience with his excitable prose "funny", since he was—he informed me tensely—"a better writer than you."

Well, that's fine.

The surprising thing is not that so much of the work is hopelessly bad, or just plain illiterate; because it isn't. That at least would leave one free to toss at them the famous Naipaullian quip ("This is absolutely terrible! Promise me you'll never write anything again. But listen, you have beautiful handwriting! Have you ever thought of applying for a job as a law clerk?"). But it isn't like that at all. By now I would lay claim to being something of an authority on the unpublished, and unpublishable, manuscripts of young Trinidad; they constitute among them a kind of eerie, invisible sub-culture in this loud country; and I hope you'll believe me: there is more "potential," more "promise" for fiction writing in this country than any population of a million-plus souls has any right to expect.

And yet, at the end of the day, it just isn't happening.

Thinking about this evoked for me the image of a yacht race that took place in the Gulf recently. The wind was blowing strongly, but it stopped, as if blocked by a wall, 100 metres or so from the next mark on the course. The first boat to sail incontinently through that wall was immediately becalmed, and sat there, sails disconsolately flapping, with nothing to do

and nowhere to go; and the following boats, recognising this, turned away to stay on the wind side of the wall. In this way the stragglers caught up, and soon there were 25 boats sailing up and down along the perimeter of an invisible semicircle, at whose centre lay the prized mark none dared approach—not with the becalmed boat sitting there, sails flapping, like a scarecrow warning: Come no further. So near and yet so far, you might say; and that is the heartbreak of young fiction writers in Trinidad.

Why is this?

I don't know. I could trot out a dozen academic explanations, but the truth is, I don't know.

But I know there is always *some* corruption: some ambition which is either ludicrously wide of reality, or otherwise well-intended and sad.

Chief among the first is a kind of fiction within the fiction: the young author's fantasy that the manuscript scalding his hands is destined to be "a bestseller". Standing between bestsellerdom, and all *that* implies (money, fame, money, reading tours, money, movie rights, *money!*) is only the small hurdle of *finding a publisher*.

A bestseller!

Who do these kids think they are, and what country do they think they're living in? Do they really believe that because they can put on designer jeans and strut around in "malls" and "pubs", they are part of that world that deals in "bestsellers," that all they need is to *find a publisher*? Can they, by no means talentless, only young, really be so ignorant of the privilege of our poverty, here, as to not know what fate awaits them? And what will they do when they find out—stop writing, become a lawyer or a doctor, sell something?

But you cannot argue with this type; cannot begin to introduce the notion of service, or service to what. (One character told me insultingly in conclusion that he hadn't really come for my opinion—only to find out if I would help him *find a publisher* for his manuscript which, he was sure, would be "a bestseller"). One should be inured by now to this kind of thing, to play-play writers living in a play-play of the mind country. But it's wearying, nonetheless: the same old iconography of betrayal of the gift, year by year.

There is another kind of betrayal, one that is subtler, and sadder.

A young woman came to me the other day with a manuscript of stories she'd written. I read them; and, not for the first time, was surprised and pleased to see the fiction writer's gift displayed on the page. Her stories were inexperienced and amateurish; they showed every sign of having been written by someone writing in isolation—someone who has had no contact with older and better writers than herself. But her prose was literate, even musical; her imaginative grasp was, most times, sound; and she had shouldered, most of the time, with uncommon character, the double burden of responsibility to her society (which means to say, to the suffering and the poor), and to the muse of fiction, the balanced apprehension of felt life.

Apart from her inexperience, her only fault was an intermittent preachiness. From time to time, betraying the inviolability of felt life, she stepped from the shadows where every fiction writer belongs to lecture her audience directly. But when I pointed this out to her, she balked.

It was true, she said; too true, too true. But then, she concluded sadly, maybe she shouldn't write fiction. She felt too strongly about certain issues to have the patience to integrate and subsume them to the arctic imperatives of fiction. Maybe she should write discursive prose instead.

Her sincerity was obvious, and it was difficult to tell her that her attitude, too, was a betrayal. I know she will read this, and I hope she will listen to me; *listen to me!*

Do you think that your views matter, any more than the President's, or the gardener's? Do you think that an eye and an ear and a heart like yours were placed on earth to discuss the Panday-Robinson nonsense, or women's lib, or the state of the roads in Maracas Valley? What about your characters, those people you made, and *their* right to live, with the grave vivacity of everyman and everywoman? When you talk about being impatient, don't you mean opinionated—don't you mean, sometimes, lazy and vain? How will you, a woman of character, shot through the head with the gift—how will you serve, not man, but God?

What can I tell you.

I remember once, when I was a kid... I used to take my poems, hot from the typewriter, and zoom down to Derek Walcott's in Petit Valley. One time, I remember, I grew impatient with his criticisms, and said something like, "Ah, well, what the hell; I just write for fun;" and then was surprised (and secretly, cravenly pleased) when he flew into a rage, and weeks later was still inveighing in print against young writers who "did writing for fun". So I suppose it's my turn now. But I'm older than he was, and frailer, and weary to the bone of watching the Muse kicked around, by gifted young writers in this country, for reasons staunch or puerile. So here's what.

Here are a few quotes. I happen to agree with them.

An author should be more than content if he finds he has made a difference to a handful of people, or given innocent pleasure to a small company. (A.C. Benson).

It is bad to go out and look at things if you wish to write about them. You must let them look at you. (Henry Ward Beecher).

All authentic writing comes from an individual; but a final judgement of it will depend, not on how much individuality it contains, but how much of common humanity. (John Peale Bishop).

Writing is a dog's life, but the only life worth living. (Gustave Flaubert).

Add to these the quote at the head of this column, and the following (from myself): "You will *never* write a bestseller."

Now, then. If you're content with *all* the above, you can get in touch, and we'll look at your hopeful moist and shining words together. If *any* of the

above dismays you and makes you want to frown, if you're even subliminally resistant to any of them, do us both a favour. Go join a civil rights movement or a political party. Go get somebody else to help you find a publisher for your bestseller. Stay away from this columnist. Leave this columnist alone.

AJS at 75

Ian McDonald writes:

"Among other things, I would like this issue of *Kyk-over-Al* to be considered as a small but feverently expressed symbolic gift for AJS who celebrates his 75th birthday on January 12th, 1989. I had hoped to produce a book of his Collected Poems for the occasion but the considerable work involved could not be completed in time. It will be done during 1989. In delving for the poems AJS has written over nearly 60 years more than 100 unpublished poems by him have been discovered. It is a treasure trove to be sorted and edited and made available for the benefit of all those interested in the literary history of the Caribbean.

To me AJS is a poet first and foremost, but his overall contribution to the cultural tradition of Guyana and the Caribbean is truly astonishing. I do not think the younger writers and academics grasp it fully. The AJS bibliography compiled by the National Library in 1974 was already 100 pages long and since then must easily have doubled in length. This amazing man's work contains poems, historical publications, reviews, essays, addresses, entries in anthologies, forewords, lectures, talks, pamphlets, memoirs, sermons, eulogies, magazine work, and books in such profusion that one would be excused for thinking this was the record of a school, not one man alone.

He has been honoured, yet he can never be honoured enough. *Kyk* is his brain-child and the child of his heart. Let this issue stand as a small token of the love and admiration countless people around the Caribbean and the world feel for him on his 75th birthday."

CARIBBEAN BASIN

Islands described as emerald border
this sea where once before piracy was law.
This basin that the present predators
slit with their fins like periscopes once saw
swift rape of gaping children just as green
with innocence. Their awe they gave as welcome,
but when the reek of blood brought cognisance
of guns to make them glutton's prey their staves
and darts in answer fought the wind like straw.

Yet innocence persists like upturned keels
of boats that will not sink: hearts no less ripe
for pickings and invasions open up
to messages of iron on the waves;
tides bear the doctrine of the sharpened claw
in fresh assaults upon benevolence
and television's magic dupes them with its reels
of El Dorado marked with stars and stripes.

It is the age-old decoy for the poor:
the ship of bounty sailing in to shore
before the after-life which comes to strike
uneven distributions from the score.
Meanwhile they learn to emulate the shark
cruising with avarice at their open door
and turn away from socialistic crap.
You can't eat ideology, he said,
and with one swipe wiped Christ off the map.

CHILDREN

Was it for them I drove
that clanking street car
down the years
from its terminal of promise
clattering round bends and corners
with the structure creaking
and the bell clanging danger,
scraping along worn rails
bucking at stops
to pick up passengers?
There were so many times
it jerked me so sharply
jumping off was
the only salvation,
but faith was on red.
Was it for them
I held the course
and paid no attention,
thinking I was the rail
on which their wheels were running,
or did tram lines define
the only kind of courage
that I knew?

Bitter coins paid the fare,
what made myth so sweet
to swallow? Myth was the power
that kept the wheels turning.
I spun it well, but I did not know.
All that I knew was
I could not leave them.
I could not manoeuvre
the skid.

MARK MCWATT

LADY NORTHCOTE

And she must have looked
like a governor's lady
when they flung champagne at her
long time ago; all polished wood
and brass and delicate white
for the tropics.

But when I first saw her
at the stelling at Kumaka
—a raw teenager out for kicks—
she seemed excitingly abused,
had taken her licks
from years of men and sea
with her pride and style intact
—or just sufficiently drained
that she could notice the attentions
of a mere boy like me.

When the storm hit
four hours from Waini Point
she danced as in a fit,
nostalgic for her frolic of the past
when she sparkled with polished brass
and with the wit of those
who journeyed for the fun of it.
she plunged and reared,
taking the breaking wave upon her breast
—flat and hard now, and dun,
but comforting, none the less,
especially to a traveller like me,
still young enough to think
that strong women are the best.

Then, in the grey light before dawn
she slipped quietly into harbour,
breathless, mysterious, a little naughty
—like all the “perfect ladies”
of my adolescent dreams.

AUNTY PANTY

The male cousins of the compound
roaming with my brother's air gun,
and tired of holed lizards and guavas
and frail, sad bundles of feathers,
came upon the single, stark
flap of white upon the line:

"Look! Aunty panty!", someone said.

My brother aimed, fired;
the garment flipped
as in a sudden whip
of wind,
and snapped back—a frayed hole
in the crotch.

"Right in the pussy",
my cousin Eric, laughing, said.

We all took turns
until the thing began to shred
on the line,
and thoughts of consequences
suddenly came to mind.

"Wha' dey going say?"

—"Aw, is only Aunty".

As the thing fell to earth at last.

"Only Aunty". "Aunty" was all
we ever called that tall,

drooping woman—remote
relative of my father—who had
returned from some far city of snow and trains
because she was sick—"a sickness
of the brain", my mother had explained.

"What she damn-well need is a man",

We'd heard my father say
above the women's protests,
and I've often thought since
that it was this last "truth"
—repeated and respected among us boys—
that pulled the trigger on that day.

I, as the group's hoarder of secrets,
hid the evidence, but
we were never found out:
poor Aunty went to hospital
and died soon after.
Years later, rummaging for something
amidst old scout scarves
and discarded socks and ties,
I came upon the yellowed shreds;
"Aunty panty", my mind said,
remembering.
But I prayed for the living,
not the dead.

PLAYGROUN

Come tek a walk
inside de playgroun
in meh mind
come tek a walk
in dis playground
of another kind

walk cross da board deh
come tek a walk in dis gutter
le we separate
de shit
from
de grass
de mud
from
de nonsense

dem people upstairs talkin
tek a walk in dis rubbish bin
le we set up we self
wid some tinnin cup
an some mango seed

le we spill up some gutter water
le we get some wringworm and some latta

tek a walk in dis playgroun
leh we chase a fowl, pelt a dog
come le we play some hide an seek
between de bushes
inside de latrine

come tek a walk inside de playgroun in meh mind
come tek a walk inside dis playgroun of another kind.

FO RENT

There is a roach
crawling around in my mind.
There is a rat
Gnawing away at my inside.
There is a mosquito
trying to get blood out of stone.
There is a snake
waiting in the bathroom to poison me with a bite.
There is the shaky step
that will not be repaired.
There is the broken windowpane
that will not be replaced.
There is the dust
for breakfast, lunch, dinner.
There is the stink
of this nightmare.
There is where I live.

And there is the landlord
coming to collect the rent.

MACDONALD DASH

LOOKING AT THE RIVER

Brown and passive is the river
Save for gentle lap of water
at greenheart piles at wharves

February sun scorches
Sandbanked and rusted wrecks in the
middle distance
memorials to the treachery
of tide and turning
Terracotta tanker glides upstream
Stack smoking in silent stillness
grey to meet blue sky
Disappear around the turn of mangroves

Thursday is silent river day
as Orinoc's daughter whispers secrets sinister

Fisherboat hurries out slowly
to Atlantic beds; its human
propellor singleted, sunburnt

River runs silently to sea
Under February noonday sun
on Thursday

I gaze on this scurvy stream
wonder about its secrets
that have eddied over centuries
from headwaters far down in the verdant west
River comes past Wappu and Akyma
The Bell, Spring Garden, Agricola
down to once staid Demerary's
capital

Men of war, muskets, scarlet coats
bloody scarves and corsairs
Dead dogs and little children
all have been in and under

Canvas and cocorite
and wallaba
all coming down down
stone and bauxite coming down
beggars and whores to and from
the upcities and holdings

Catching a queriman
Passing by Borsalen and her sisters
swimming tigers in dead of night
by Mabura

Silent secretive stream and scurvy
lifeline and lifetaker
sister to the Essequib'
and monstrous too in her secrets
Silent stream and still in
February noonday
No one can conquer you
But you are nature's swollen stream of tears

FOLKLORE

This is my legacy: sugar, sun and topsoil.
A molasses time surrounding since man's evolution
From sugar-cane—and recoiling.

Hear the agony of twenty million from Africa,
Plantation's frenzy. Whiplash, more sun and rain;
Fevered rhythms in the longing to be free.

The edifices rise higher in London;
Europe's walls have ears. Further whiplash—
Bones rattling in wayward galleys;

Upon Atlantic's waters, foam of blood.
Wilberforce, Canning, Caxton. The English Parliament
Lurching forward. Indentured,

I listen on; I am sucrose too,
In the furrowed fields, breathing in the smell,
Half-cowering, this hour of sun—

Land overturned, ground seething,
My hands still on deck, backs welted,
Groin sweating, this meeting face-to-face

With you, as we are together grounded!

IAN MCDONALD

INCIDENT PAST MIDNIGHT, BUCKSANDS

The house silent, lampless,
All close to me sleeping:
Deep in the night, alone
I go down to the edge of river.
It is a black night, velvet, no moon,
Only the stars spread like panned gold.
In the middle of the vast darkness of the river
A batteau passes, paddle-chuckle just heard
And a song comes across the pitchy water,
One man singing, not loud, a clear voice:

“Holy is the wide river,
Song of glory!
Holy is the forest tree,
Hear the glory!
Holy is morning star,
Song of glory!
Holy is the forest tree,
Hear the glory!”

The batteau goes down river slowly,
Slowly the song of the man fades in the darkness.
I think of the huge river flowing to the sea
And the sea curled vast around the earth.
I think of the river coming from the great mountains
Where it begins in small streams full of gold.
I look up at the black sky strewn with the incredible stars
And the bright net they cast on the water too.
At my back the immense forest presses
Heavy with the weight of a continent of trees.

Like a dream that came suddenly
The song drifts to silence on the immense river:
The towering forest falls down towards me:
No one wakes and I know myself alone.
I want to talk, fill up time with noise,
Speak with friends how we live everyday.
Something breaks in me, shakes me utterly:
To light the lamps, to regain the ordinary,
I utter oaths and sing and shout and pray,
Cavort beneath the stars, anything to flee
The measureless absurdity of the glory of the world.

SCHOLAR

The forest clears, socket of silence
In the huge green shout of trees:
Weather-greyed chapel, box-small, closed,
Dogs snarl and snap on long ropes
Round scarlet-blossomed trees.
My voice ripping the noon-day air
Summons the friar, frail as dried leaves.
Old age stoops him like a crescent,
One eye glass-white, skull clean-boned,
Teeth broken-black, his robe of threadbare blue.
He has never come down river.

There is no greater mystery than any man.
I see the old books I have come to see:
Shelves upon shelves in thousands once,
Latin histories, old maps, testaments and laws,
Thick books of traveller's tales and governments.
They all were brought from Heidelberg and Rome:
"A wild, green place for books,"
He gestures in the lustrous air.
"It seemed a good thing to be done.
I meant to write." He shrugs it off.
The books are crumbling, tumbled out of place,
Worm-holed, rat-eaten, damp-decayed.
They will go soon to dust like men.

I am allowed the old priest's journal:
Ten marvellous notebooks two thousand pages long,
Lined, yellowing paper half-a-century old.
I turn to April eighteenth, nineteen thirty-three:
"Rain fell night-long and in the morning
Gold-billed toucans skimmed the trees".

The last note is five year's back,
No more after. The old man shrugs again.
"To see the moon-blaze in the trees
Perfect itself. A clearer sight of God".
The entries end. The rest is blank.
Dust drifts in the warm, illumined air,
The shuttered room is still. He prays.

LOST AND FOUND

For Barbara
Dream people, places and things.

1

Dark page of hair bobbing in the wind,
A boy of fourteen or so walks downwind
Studying the ground his eyes do not see.
He does not know I exist.
He strides through the dark pages of my mind,
his long brown hands
craftily pocketed.

2

In a field where packages of rice
are doled out at the turnstile along with the tickets
there are too many people; some receive no picnic packets.
I hand mine over to a stranger who seems lost
without a handout; and return
to the sweet solitude of my studio.

3

Now they are hastily assembling new mechanical contrivances
So the minibuses can hold more baskets
and people; everyone is looking for something deposited somewhere.
Will the topheavy buses hurtle off the road
at the usual illfated bend in the mountains?
It is too late to choose
not to take one's seat for the journey.

4

In this maze of darkened streets
I have mislaid my car again,
forgotten where I parked it,
forgotten the licence number.
Have you seen my straying Lynx Escort
sand coloured and discreet?

Wrong lane, wrong colour, wrong side of street for the hour—
I fear the Manhattan cops have towed it away
never to be seen again.

Driving the car for which I'm searching
I'm frantic for directions:
What is the name of this street?
Does it lead to the exit where I dropped off my driver?
Young man discreet with his wild girls
nameless as a pack of clubs with their trefoiled bars.

Oneway streets with no signs,
turnings with no signs or sighs,
signals more confusing than the twinkling eyes of the plain...
in the ascent
to the top of this wold named Stony Hill;
where one could choose to roll off the edge.
No more persons to question or be questioned by as to
where and wherefore.

The drawing on the facing page, done in pen and ink by Stanley Greaves in the 1960's, was made in response to this poem of C.E.J. Ramcharitar-Lalla:

THE WEEDING GANG

I know the girls are coming,
For I hear the gentle humming
Of choruses they're singing on their way;
I hear their saucepans jingling,
And their cutlasses a-tingling,
Which as their music instruments they play.

They fill the silence after,
With their peals of merry laughter
Which float upon the pinion of the air;
And also ease their walking
With some idle silly talking,
With Kheesaz and boojhowals very queer.

Then once again their singing
They resume, until the ringing
Of their voices mingles with the whistling breeze;
I love to see their faces
With their smiles and subtle graces,
And I love to hear their charming melodies.



Extract from the novel

MASSALA MARAJ

by ROOPLALL MONAR

Maraj crawled out the old iron-framed bed silently and rushed into the kitchen, built in front the logie.

His heart thumped as though he had suffered a nervous spasm. He picked up an enamel cup from the shelf and filled it with water, drawn from a clay goblet. He drank the water in quick gulps, sat on a low wooden bench, belched and uttered: "Think me stooped? Me is a brahmin. Backdam work is not proper fo me caste. Me have to get one transfer morning time... have to tell overseer Brown..."

Maraj paced the kitchen now as though he had envisioned a triumph.

The big Sugar Factory brass bell had announced One. Factory grinding cane like mad, Maraj told himself. It was dark outside. Crickets and beetles whirred and hummed outside the long barrack range, divided into twelve barrack rooms called logies. The wind blew in gusts. Maraj knew whenever much rain fell the Nigger Yard was quick to be inundated. Malaria and dysentery created havoc. The place turned gloomy. Death followed. Maraj hoped it didn't rain much.

Maraj felt suffocated. The logie with its dark musty kitchen threatened to strangle him. An eternal enemy ever since his wife and himself moved in ten years ago.

"Damn bloody matchstick house," Maraj would curse, scratching his head as if looking for a solution... to escape this cramped living. "Is like you in coffin. No place to stretch you hand," Maraj would say at times, watching at his wife accusingly.

His wife, an orthodox brahmin woman, would smack her tongue perplexedly, and hustle into the bedroom. She knew Maraj would slap her if only she answered. But her mouth was strong, the words vibrating in the logie. Can't allow this man to push he finger in me eye, she would say whenever Maraj was out, then burst into a Hindi bhajan.

Maraj had a terrible temper. In such moments Maraj's temper would flare like a lighted dry bush in a cow pasture. He would curse the Estate, his brahmin caste, and wished he had never been born in this blood sucking Sugar Plantation where the driver and overseer "think you is some mule. Kicking you like football about the place," clenching his fist, and felt like cuffing the logie-walls, buff-buff, as though gripped by a fever. The fever that made him feel divided. "One foot here. One foot in India," as the elders said.

He paced the kitchen a few more times, then sat on the low

wooden bench, braced to the wall, dividing the kitchen from the dining room, and began thinking. He wanted a perfect excuse to give overseer Brown. An excuse that would warrant him a transfer from the Chop-an-Plant Gang to another Gang until he worked out another excuse. Another transfer until his goal, his true calling in life had been realised. Eh-eh, is what the use living when you can't find you true self?

"Is been a long time now since me wukkin in this Estate. Every day me turning like packsawal mango. All juice from me body draining out. If me don't make a move this time, me going to come like dry bamboo. Empty inside. And me is a brahmin. High caste Hindu. Me na suppose to work in canefield. Is why me never take up the pundit work? Is Ramdass pundit cause it. He alone want be pundit in this Estate. Bad-minded brahmin bitch. They should put two cent-piece on he eye top when he drop dead. Is tikkay Ramdass pundit throw blight at me? All brahmin in this Estate cunning like spider. Heh! You could never trust them shadow self."

Maraj churned over this self-monologue which had increased in dimension throughout the years. It was like another person speaking inside him. A person whom he was unable to quell, specially when he was alone, sitting between the front door of the logie in the evenings, self-absorbed. Impassive.

Soon after, he would burst out with a Hindi bhajan, sweet like sugar, people said.

During some nights while lying in bed, pretending to sleep, he felt this person wanted to come out, out of him like a chicken wriggling out of an egg. Take form like a man, and do the things he was unable to do: cut-ass Ishmael driver and Nauth driver. Twitch overseer Brown balls. Break Ramdass pundit neck, then ascend the Sugar Factory and laugh. Me is the boss now. Me is the big Manager...heh heh heh, feeling like the Hindu monkey god, Hanuman, flying over the whiteman's compound, a lighted torch in his hand. Heh heh heh...

Maraj shook his head twice as if to dismiss the person speaking inside him, aware now that dogs barked in the Nigger Yard, perhaps glimpsing the Moon in the western sky. Dawn was on its way. He had to work out an excuse quickly, join his fat snoring wife in bed, and wake up early. Excuse in his head. Use me brahmin sense.

He scratched his head, ruffling his sparse hair, caved-in his brain, struggling, seeing himself a weary traveller trudging up a mountain, ideas rebounded in his head like canepunts clanging against each other.

Crickets and beetles whirred, buzzed among beezie-beezie, and blacksage bush outside the logie. Maraj felt they were buzzing inside the musty kitchen. He wanted to scream, shooing away mosquitoes which surrounded him in a circle droning an incessant chorus. He wanted to crush the kiss-me-ass mosquitoes, feeling triumphant. But the killing sound, mosquitoes crushed on his bare skin, would awaken his wife.

"Like you get jumbie in you head man," his wife would say when she saw him in the kitchen at this hour in the morning. "Is why you na see pundit? It every two three night this asura jumbie coming in you head..."

Blasty woman can't understand cent from big jill, Maraj would tell himself whenever such an encounter had taken place. He couldn't sleep while the other person in him kept on talking. Sitting alone in the kitchen, drinking cupfuls of water, scratching his head, he would slowly, patiently quell the voice in him, putting the person to sleep.

His wife, Marajin, believed an asura, a Hindu evil spirit, haunted Maraj, especially when Maraj woke-up during midnights, complaining of terrible nightmares, sweating, eyes glazed.

Stoopid woman! Don't know head from bullfoot, Maraj would say to himself. If me no break me back in canefield to get money, is how she going to eat? Is me badluck to get brahmin wife. And is shame and disgrace fo brahmin wife work in canefield. Chu chu chu... stoopid woman. She ain't know is me god does talk in me?

Maraj became alert. A fat mosquito droned around his head. He wanted to trap it. Crushed it. The dank musty smell emanating in the kitchen invaded his nostrils. He wanted to vomit. The mosquito kept threatening, buzzing, bent on the kill.

Like you get jumbie in you head man. The words echoed in his head. He relaxed himself and shooed the mosquito, using his hands. The excuse, the plan kept developing in his brain. Yes! Yes! He smiled by himself. The excuse assumed a form. A body. Maraj's twin brother. Good, he uttered silently, then jumped as if stung by a marabunta. He cursed.

He picked up the cup, refilled it with water from the goblet and drank it as though he had not drank water for days. He belched quietly, and felt a crawling sensation in his stomach. He hoped he wouldn't have to visit the latrine at this time in the morning. He knew of the many jumbies, evil spirits of dead people, which prowled the Nigger Yard at this time in the morning. He knew that many of the evil spirits were looking to extract revenge. He knew that sometimes the innocent paid for the guilty. But me never push me finger in nobody eye, who dead and gone, Maraj consoled himself as though exonerating himself from self-guilt.

Maraj constricted his bowel, the excuse forming into a person quite like his own twin brother. He shooed away a mosquito, loitering by his ears, and said quietly: "Me get overseer Brown in me hand. Me get the bitch," doing a little dancing.

He crawled into bed quietly, covering from head to his feet with a floursack sheet. Mosquitoes droned. Me get overseer Brown in me hand, he repeated in his mind until sleep dawned in him.

Ouch ouch! "Like this back want kill me," he told Marajin in the

dew-mist morning, watching at her like a sly mongoose.

She wrestled with the iron cooking pot, and canaree, in the smoke-filled kitchen. She had finished cooked the rice and the boulangar curry. It had not dawned fully as yet, but sugar workers had already awakened. Their musty, dingy kitchen buzzed with activities. By the time it was daybreak most walked out their logies: cutlasses, shovels, forks, hung across their shoulders, bags with working clothes and lunch saucepans slung on them.

Maraj flitted about in the logie, the excuse taking a shape. Ouch ouch! he moaned, eyes darkened, watching the logie-walls which housed cockroaches and ants. He had already changed to go to Order-Line. As he ate roti and curry, sitting on the low wooden bench, his wife packed his bag, a daily morning ritual enacted for years. How he hated it. But me time going to come, he reminded himself, aware of the other person inside him. Is one-one dirt does build dam.

Ouch! he moaned again, seeing overseer Brown in his mind. Damn bully! Feel he own the Estate. Own the people. Me going to show he who is sense man. Smart fly. Me is a smart brahmin.

Maraj didn't want to alarm his wife by saying: "Me going to ask overseer Brown fo one transer."

She would rile, then sulk into a corner, cursing her fate to be born a woman. Her previous karma ought to be blamed, she would tell herself, vowing to extract the answer from Lord Shiva when she did her puja the coming Sunday morning.

Is damn lazy he lazy, she would tell herself, impotent to voice her views in such a precarious matter where their future was concerned.

Maraj had a presentiment of his wife acting in this way. Deem him a lazy man. Chut! Is me have to bring in the money. Not she, Maraj told himself, eating quickly. He decided to kep his mouth close. He clowned behind the facade, moaning frequently.

She threw him a sharp look. It stung him like a followme insect. O Gaad Shree Bhagawan! like this woman know the inside of me mind, Maraj told himself. He washed his hands quickly, gargled through the kitchen window, belched, then hustled to pickup his working bag and cutlass.

"See you Marajin," Maraj said sweetly as he passed through the logie front door. He trotted to the main walking path dampened with morning dew, feeling released. Like the woman know me up to some trick, he asked himself, unsettled. Brahmin woman proper smart. But me is a smarter brahmin, he reminded himself, imbued with pride. Think backra man more sensible than me? Is now me eye open to the real thing. Is me and overseer Brown now...

He walked quickly, concentrating on the backbone that would make the self-induced backache look serious, critical in the presence of overseer Brown.

Something in that man mind, Marajin's instinct told her as she dusted the kitchen flooring with a coconut branch broom. He up to something but Shree Bhagawan going to tell me. True! Soon after, she would tend the vegetable garden, cultivated behind the logie, examining each plant, their roots, to ensure that nobody's fowls, or a rat, had dug up the root during the previous night. Neighbouring fowls usually created havoc to the plants. She had seen herself on many occasions, pinning one of the fowl on the ground with her feet, slicing out the fowl's claws with a cutlass until it bled, uttering "damn badmass" in Hindi.

Something in that man mind, Marajin told herself again, perturbed, heading in the small, stuffed-up bedroom to make-up the bed.

By now the morning looked pale, colourless, the wind blowing slightly cold. Overnight drizzle had dampened the Nigger Yard. Dusty dams dotted with muddy lumps. Morning dew had still clouded above. Mist like smokestalks settled on cork tres, and on logie roofs.

Maraj experienced a slight chill as he clambered up the creaking wooden steps, wedged-on to the High Bridge, which acted as a gateway that led into the Nigger Yard. It was an old bridge - something like an antique, still sturdy, bearing the weight and frustrations of countless footsteps, that had daily treaded on it throughout the years, echoing with footprints of cringing, indentured immigrants.

It spanned a blackwater stream... the water always cold, iridescent, tempting to little boys. Moss was perpetually seem in both corners of the stream. Silverbait fish and shrimp teemed in the water. The stream began from the deputy Manager's yard in the east, and snaked into the canefields, joined by other smaller streams, running in different directions passing through mango-walks, coconut fields, bramble fields, and further down into more canefields, and the Lamaha Canal.

It was a favourite stream to sugar workers, the water being used for religious purposes. It was called blackwater-trench by them.

Maraj was joined by a batch of sugar workers as he descended the Bridge, and landed in the redbrick road. It was dampened. The big, old wooden Hospital was on the opposite side of the road. An aroma of disinfectant, tablets, iodine, and putrid cotton wads emanated from it. Maraj felt the smell in his nostrils. He coughed. The Hospital looked frightening. Maraj avoided becoming a patient in that Hospital.

That going to drive me to me grave, he reminded himself anytime he was plagued with either fever, chest cold, acute bellyache, or headache. He preferred consulting Miriam, the African woman, whose herbal remedies always arrested his ailment.

The workers discussed the inhuman treatment meted out to them from the hands of Ishmael and Nauth drivers. The low wages being paid for years now. "Is only a proper cut-rass on Ishmael and Nauth could stop this blasted eye-pass."

"We should do what them Non Pareil people do," a canecutter

named Seeram talked, eyes reddened. "Is how long we able tolerate this kiss-me-ass bullyism?"

Maraj agreed wholeheartedly, willing his backbone-structure to respond to his emotion. Have to get this transfer, he reminded himself. Chop-an-Plant going to swinge me like ripe mango in hot weather. Backdam work ain't fit fo me brahmin caste. Me is a high nation Hindu, and is time me use me sense now. Maraj chuckled, conveying the impression that he was laughing at a joke, just cracked by one of the cane-cutters.

The joke concerned Nauth driver. Two weeks ago on the Tuesday night, Nauth nearly killed himself with fright, running towards his logie, cursing on the way. Nauth driver nurtured a deep belief that Baizee's ghost—the spirit of Baizee's dead body, wanted revenge on him. He lived in constant fear.

While being a shovelman in Nauth driver's gang, Nauth used to make it hard on Baizee due to Baizee's rebellious temperament. Baizee felt the shovelmen were being robbed of their true value as shovelmen. There was always an outburst, heated arguments between Nauth and Baizee.

"Sixty cent a day can't pay," Baizee would shout, stamping his feet on the ground, tone harsh, eyes furious.

One hot midday in the canefields during an argument, Baizee told Nauth: "If me dead before you, me going to haunt you, and you family til coffin catch them."

Nauth shivered. Felt a chilliness in his spine. He knew such a threat could be dangerous. Notebook and pencil trembled in his hands. Should Baizee ponder on those words constantly, and say it aloud, during the time his death was drawing near, the words could assume a spectral form, bent on creating havoc to the living victim. Nauth believed such things happened. It ocured to others. Ghost coming back to extract revenge...

A year ago, after issuing the threat to Nauth, Baizee died due to the ravages of T.B. Since then Nauth was not the same. He imagined seeing Baizee's ghost several times. The mule-boys knew of Nauth's fear. They exploited on it whenever the opportunity arose.

On this Tuesday night it was dark and gloomy, tinged with a silence that was frightening. Nauth was returning from overseer Stanley's bungalow, found in the Compound. He was walking on the redbrick road, heading towards the High Bridge. A grove of big, flowing fig trees with the Hospital further in, lined one side of the road. Blackwater-trench ran alongside the other side of the road. Across the trench a few cakeshops and the Masjid were seen. Further in, rows of barrack ranges ran alongside each other.

Every object in and around the road was capped with a darkness, compounded with a lurking silence likened to a deadly, alert snake in

crouching canetrash.

Nauth shivered as he walked, cautious, peering his eyes among the still'd pregnant trees. Crickets and beetles whirred, hummed. It broke the monotony of the silence. In such moments Nauth always recalled Baizee's words: "If me dead before you, me going to haunt you, and you family til coffin catch them..."

This man Baizee like a pest in me soul, Nauth told himself. He never fathomed that the night, yet early would have changed into this eerie, frightening state... "like a damn jumbie behind you shadow."

He kept on walking, uttering a mantra from the Hindu Puranas. Why this man Baizee don't go and rest in peace, Nauth told himself, walking quickly, still peering his eyes.

Dinki and three mule-boys held conversation under the big cork tree, growing by the edge of Blackwater-trench in the Nigger Yard section.

Two hours before, as evening was turning into night, Dinki and the mule-boy had seen Nauth as he crossed the High Bridge, landed in the redbrick road, and headed east. They suspected that Nauth was on one of his nightly visits to overseer Stanley.

"See the dog? He going to take news to overseer," one of the mule-boys had said, spitting in the trench. "People like them is leech."

"Hold on. Rain don't fall at one man door," Dinki talk. "He own rope going to strangle he. Remember madman Rusty? How he slice-off Sambo driver cock, and put it in Sambo mouth like sweetie?"

"Ha boy! Man don't see, but Gad seeing. How long you believe he going to get sugar in he mouth?" the second mule-boy talked, and spit-
ted as if the spittle was a thorn in his flesh. He eyes blazed with hurt and revenge.

Dinki and the mule-boys eyed at Nauth until Nauth turned into the smooth, redbrick road, lined with sweet-smelling flowers, growing on both sides. The road led into the fenced-in Compound, filled with electric lights, beautiful bungalows, well-kept lawns. A Compound inaccessible to Dinki and the mule-boys, except on business. A world where God-blessd people lived, Dinki and the mule-boys always said. Nauth disappeared in there.

Dinki and the mule-boys resumed their conversation: mules, managers, struggle of the Indian people in India, wedding-houses, weeding-gang, women...

They were about to go to their respective logies when they spotted a man, coming out from the Compound. They recalled Nauth. Dinki mounted the High Bridge. He peered at the walking figure. "Is Nauth self," Dinki said, and vacated the Bridge quickly.

They knew of Nauth's fear. Baizee's ghost. It was still rumoured to be around. Elders claimed seeing it, prowling the Nigger Yard in quiet moonlight nights during the early morning hours.

"Baizee jumbie want something," elders would say, hardly venturing outside until four o'clock in the morning "when all jumbie gone and sleep."

Dinki and the mule-boys, also, believed Baizee's ghost wanted Nauth, after hearing of Baizee's threat to Nauth while Baizee was alive.

"Ahwe play Baizee jumbie pon Nauth," Dinki said, smacking his tongue as though he had eaten a delicious mango.

"You damn right. Let he shit cut," one of the mule-boys said, mischief abound in his eyes, memory opened to past encounters which took place during moonlight nights in the Nigger Yard—people playing ghost at people.

"You hide under the bridge," Dinki said, anxious, watching at Nauth.

The mule-boys scamperd under the Bridge, uttering quietly: "Good if he rass could fall down and dead."

Dinki was slim-built and darkskin in his late teens. He took out his shirt and fitted it around his head. His shirt was whitish in colour. Across his head it looked like a loose orhni. People in the Nigger Yard sometimes described a ghost, looking the way Dinki's head looked now.

Dinki hid behind the big cork tree stem, waiting on Nauth to cross the High Bridge, and entered the Nigger Yard. Dinki's body from his neck downward hardly showed. He was dark. The night was dark. He looked like a terrified ghost with a white-white head, the kind of ghost elders told their children about, seen mostly in the canefields during moonlight nights.

"White-head jumbie!" elders pronounced, fright showing in their eyes. The children huddled in a corner, eyes tight-shut, kerosene lamps flickered like candleflies... logies eerie and silent.

Dinki waited, caught in suspense, heart thumping, eyes flitting at Nauth, laughing inwardly.

Nauth avoided looking at the Hospital. It drove more fear into him. He quickened his steps, and clambered up the High Bridge.

The mule-boys heard Nauth's footsteps. They crouched, subdued, enduring black ants which stung their skin, mosquitoes which menaced their faces. They were anxious, hearts palpitating.

Dinki felt the same way. As he looked around no one was spotted in the vicinity. Good! Dinki told himself, aware now that Nauth was coming down the steps, entering the Nigger Yard.

He squeezed his nose, and emerged from behind the tree stem, tip-toeing in the manner a ghost was seen walking.

"Nauth driver is you me want." Dinki's tone sounded nasal. The words slow and drawling. He walked up to Nauth.

Nauth was taken by surprise. He halted, felt his feet heavy. His heart pounded, perspiration gathered on his forehead. Fireflies flickered about him.

Dinki tip-toed slowly towards him. "Is you me want Mister Nauth." Dinki's shirt flapped now like a flag after being slackened from his head.

"O Gaad! this is Baizee jumbie self-self," Nauth screamed, deviated from Dinki's approach, and ran screaming on top his voice, accelerating more speed on the dry mud dam, running alongside the Blackwater Trench. His instinct led him to his logie.

Half the sugar workers were out their logies when Nauth landed in his logie, and fell down frothing.

Next morning Nauth's neighbours reported they heard Nauth telling his wife that he planned to enlist Ramdass pundit in his plan. Himself, and Ramdass pundit would visit the burial ground one dark night and pin-down Baizee's grave. Tie Baizee's jumbie in the bloody coffin, spiking the grave-top with seven nails, and bury a bunch of garlic leaves in the grave.

"Is only that going to cool Baizee jumbie forever. Pin he ass in the grave until he bone rotten," Nauth told his wife Beti after he regained his senses. It was around ten o'clock the very night.

The neighbourhood heard everything.

Nobody know Dinki and the mule-boys had staged this act. They never divulged it. They knew the consequence of such a disclosure. Nauth driver would take them up to the Head Manager.

But it was news the next morning. Baizee jumbie scared the shit out of Nauth. "Next time he going to break Nauth neck..."

"Baizee jumbie should break Nauth neck the same night," one of the cane-cutters talked, tone heavy with contempt.

"You damn right," Maraj said, beginning to display a slight stoop in his walk. Me action to overseer Brown must be clear like daylight, Maraj said to himself, keeping abreast with the canecutters.

Maraj and the canecutters walked past the Hospital mortuary, the Head Manager's white painted bungalow, and the lawn tennis court. On the other side of the redbrick road, across a blackwater stream, were crumpled little cottages which housed the African sugar workers. Further ahead was the Pay Office, the Foundry, and the Engine House. Further inland, behind the Storeroom was the big sprawling Sugar Factory, and the Workshop.

Maraj and the canecutters crossed over a wooden bridge, the mule-stable seen opposite, and swung into a broad, grassy muddam. About twenty five yards ahead sugar workers clustered in different groups around their respective drivers and overseers.

This was Order-Line. Here the sugar workers were given orders for the day. After, they would head into the canefields, walking in batches.

The morning mist was dying away like ice in water. The sun peeped between thick, puffy clouds. Mule-boys' voices echoed in the

stable. The claybrick factory chimney kept belching out thick, blackish smoke which sailed away in a western direction.

Maraj and the four canecutters joined the big gang of canecutters. Maraj's backbone responded to his self-induced emotion. He felt burning pain in the back.

Have to get this transfer he told himself, watching at Ishmael driver and overseer Brown. Is me and overseer Brown...me know he is a smart fly...

NANCY PILGRIMAGE

by RAS MICHAEL

Nancy 'Tory!

Nancy 'Tory!

Nancy 'Tory!

Nancy story ain't got bad word. Nancy story is what come out of Nancy mouth. Wha' Nancy see with Nancy eye.

Nancy!

You been dey? Well Nancy been all about. Even when Georgetown was a small small town and people use to send to the ice factory for ice and only Putagee girls use to work in them store in Water Street, Nancy use to spin he web wherever he see they going have story. That is how Nancy get to know about Hector. He went home that night in Hector pants fold. The same night that Hector did brace he self 'gainst Beth behind Beth front door, running he hands all over she.

"Oh God Beth. I got to see you again. I going pick you up tomorr... nah, nah not tomorrow.....Oh God Beth but I got to see you again."

Right then Nancy climb down a web and crawl up Hector pants fold, entered the new model Datsun and when Hector foot mash the accelerator to drive out the Ghetto, Nancy been dey with he.

'Well I would of never believe it,' Nancy say to heself when he investigated Hector's house next morning. All these years of Nancy life, Nancy never live in a house like this yet. But Nancy smart, Nancy investigate every drawer and cupboard and corner from the minute he dropped out Hector's pants fold that foreday morning.

Living with Hector was like living in a different world to how life was in the ghetto in the room with Beth and the children. At first Nancy was astonished by the amount of rooms the house had and the amount of beds. Everybody had a room with bed in the ghetto but these beds... Nancy just up and climb all over and feel the softness. Nancy tour the whole place but take up residence inside the toolshed under the 'downs tree' since it remind he more of ghetto life inside there where you had odds and ends. He spin a web over where some 'downs' fall through a hole in the side of the wall and start rotting. They had some fat fly down there.

Is not that Nancy didn't appreciate the comforts of Hector's house, Nancy use to spend hours in front of the T.V. each day and Nancy had a web right under the telephone table where he use to listen in on quite a few calls. Is not inside the house Nancy use to be whole day?

NANCY!

(The reader got to shout...) 'TORY!

Right! Is not that Nancy didn't appreciate the comforts of Hector's house but he did notice in the kitchen that Hector had a maid, two cob-web brooms, two tins Baygon plus a tin of Shelltox in the up-stairs bath room

where Hector wife use to bathe. Hector does bathe in the downstairs bathroom. However, Nancy make 'Heights' and set up herself right where he was dining. Hector's kitchen he left to Hector, Hector's family and Hector's maid.

Hector's family consisted of Hector's wife who Nancy got to know quite well on distant terms, she had her own bedroom. Hector's teenaged daughter (Nancy couldn't take she at all but he used to check she out for kicks), she had her own room.

Hector's son had his own room too. He was cool with Nancy. Nancy had a web in there too. And Hector. Hector was forty-seven and an important man. Hector's runnings was confidential. Being an important man Hector sometimes use to get a telephone call from the Minister's Secretary and Hector use to got to go and talk at meetings with the Minister and with committees and the Bank Manager, sometimes for hours, then the newspaper would publish that Hector going away on a 'Government Mission'. At that time a lot of people use to phone Hector and some use to come and see Hector at the house and talk to he quiet quiet in the study. Nancy would overhear them 'nough time whilst he up on some shelf running through a volume of Selected Poems which was a favourite of his or "Capitalism and Slavery" by Eric Williams which was equally delighting to him. Nancy would sometimes overhear them and on a few occasions Nancy had noticed people giving Hector some small squarish packages before going to their cars and driving away.

Hector use to go away for a week or two weeks but Nancy didn't go as he did pick up reasoning in the ghetto about foreign travel 'bout how Bob Marley did pass out there and that Bunny Wailer don't travel by plane. Nancy was a original 'Wailers' fan. As a matter of fact was some of these same reasonings from the ghetto and Nancy experience as a ghetto spider that save Nancy life 'nough time in he fight for survival.

NANCY!

Reader shouts 'TORY!

Nancy and the maid had a constant battle for survival. Nancy and Hector wife had a constant battle for survival. Even Hector and Hector's daughter used to test Nancy skill. Everyday Nancy had to rebuild or repair a web. Only Hector son didn't use to 'dig nothing'. The only web that Nancy never had to worry about was the one in the T.V. room. Hector house had a special fancy room with lacquered walls, trophies, fancy furniture and plenty Ivy plants running up the walls.

Nancy build a house between the ivy and the wall and he call that he tropical residence. From up there Nancy use to watch the twenty-one inch T.V. and any other thing that taking place inside the room. Like when Hector gone away and the children out, Nancy use to enjoy the sex films with Hector wife and she special friends. Hector daughter use to have she own runnings in the T.V. room too, but that use to be when she was alone by she self. Sometimes she use to do it in she bedroom in front the mirror

or when she lay down in the soft single bed. These things use to amaze Nancy cause they was different to what use to take place in the ghetto. Hector son was normal. He use to smoke marijuana like everybody else.

It happen sudden. Everything in Guyana does happen sudden. Since January everybody does be looking out for the May-June rain and yet when it fall it does fall sudden. It come as a sudden shock to Nancy. No not a shock, Nancy don't feel that, but like a surprise. Was only the night before Nancy was watching late night T.V. with the whole family. Some friends did even drop in and up in he web Nancy did hear when Hector did say quite vehemently "They should jail that bitch!"

Well Nancy look down to see if was because the Minister was rubbing up Hector wife leg in the dark that make Hector say that but was the T.V. Hector did talk to as they was broadcasting Col Northe testimony and showing Reagan face pon the screen. During the rest of the night everything went alright. They was drinking and smoking and eating and the Minister who did drop in with a few friends was joking with Hector and slapping Hector's back whilst Hector wife was pouring the Minister a fresh drink and fulling up the Minister plate with corn-beef and chow-mein. Everybody was happy until next morning.

Well it was Nancy who first read it in the Sunday Papers. Nancy had another web in the letter box from which he use to read the daily papers whenever the daily papers come early. Nancy saw it on page 3. "Hector Under Government Enquiry". It had a photograph of Hector and the story though brief was that the Government wasn't too happy 'bout how Hector use to conduct the Government business. They even say that they was taking a careful look at Hector's salary and Hector bank account. Nancy burst out a laugh, if they was looking for Hector runnings they would have to look for it in the other house that Hector did buy and not even Hector wife did know 'bout that. Hector did make the carpenter build a special hiding place and Hector did hide a whole set a square purple paper there. Nancy did get to know that these was money from since he days in the ghetto cause it was quite popular and people called it inflationary. However, was the smaller gray-coloured foreign ones that Hector did like most.

Well, whole day the telephone ringing. Nobody didn't come to the house but the Minister and all phone and he tell Hector wife not to come by the office or check he out right now as he was busy. The Minister and all was in the news-papers. On page four the papers did read that the Minister was to turn a Senior Minister and that the Government was sending he to Africa on a mission. Is not that these events that was playing out was anything big to Nancy. Nancy born and grow in the ghetto. Nancy know 'bout runnings. When Papa did snatch the payroll by the Bank of Guyana, Nancy been right pon the corner gutter plaiting one another hair; same time Papa burst the corner, clear the gutter, the payroll sail through the air; it land on sister Benji step; Papa clear the six foot pailing—Nancy been to the party in the ghetto that night.

These things was no big things to Nancy. Hector worries was small potatoes to Nancy. As a matter of fact Hector didn't have no worries compared to Beth neither. Beth had three young children, she self and the house rent. Hector had he own house, he salary, he runnings plus he had he family. But Hector had problems. He certainly had problems because Nancy did see he wrinkle up he forehead when he had to take off some of the small grey money from off a pack in the new house he wife didn't know 'bout.

A few days later it come over the news that the enquiry against Hector get dropped, and Hector resign the job. He did even go to the embassy and talk to some body there to get a visa. That is how Hector begin travelling. He didn't become a trader. He was just a traveller. Nobody never see he carry anything or bring anything. Ask Nancy?

NANCY!

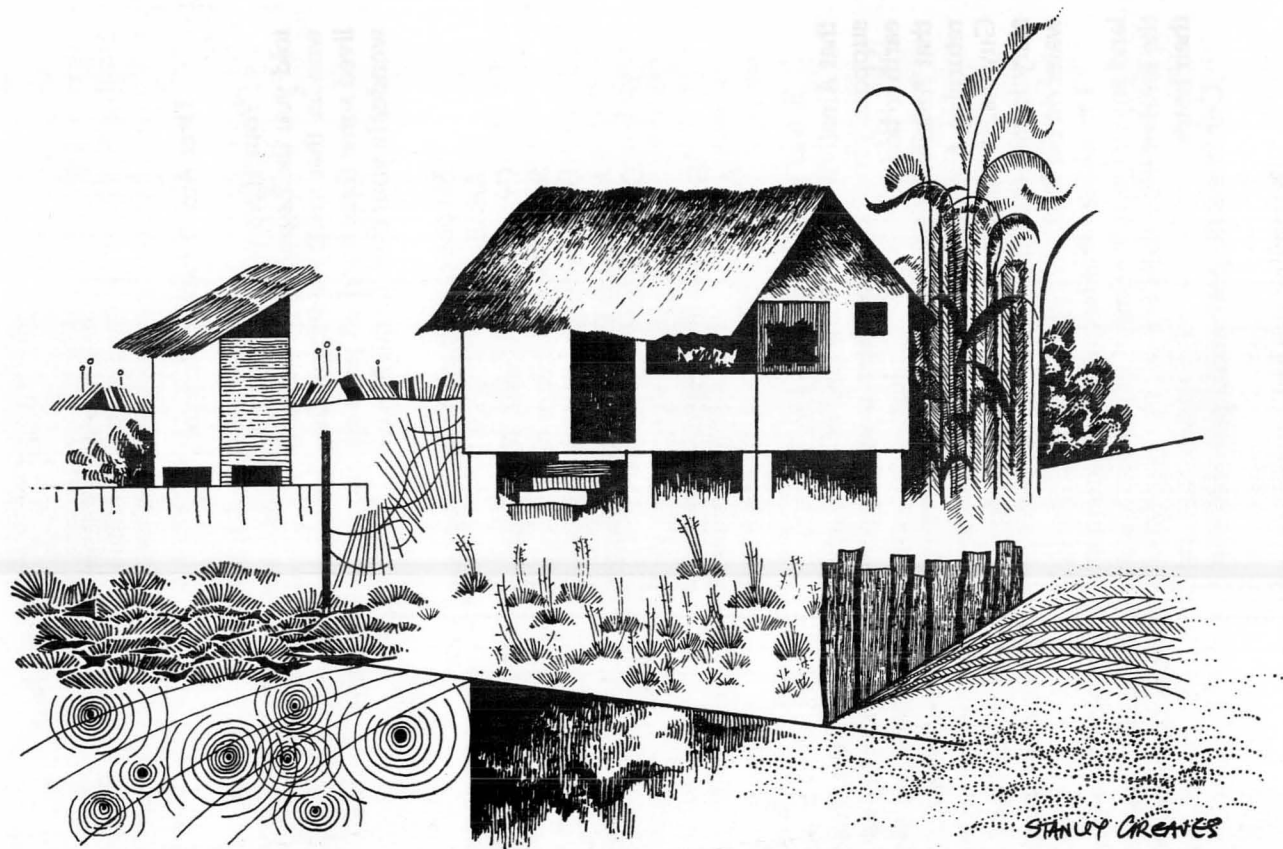
Reader shouts..... 'TORY!

Nancy notice the small packs in the hiding place in the new house growing fast. How Hector got them Nancy couldn't say. Nancy heself never went overseas with Hector. He had recently read that scientist had made a fly and fishermen use them on hooks to catch fish. Nancy say not me. He never went.

Hector put on more weight now. He voice get more gruff too. Nancy got a new web too, right under the passenger front seat of Hector's brand new Mercedes one-eighty. Is anybody's guess as to how long that residence going remain. The Mercedes got a mini vacuum cleaner. Hector wife and the Senior Minister is even better friends now. The two of them start go up to the new house together after Hector give her the key. He building another one. Beth? Well Beth is another story.

NANCY!

Shout 'TORY nuh.



THE STORY OF AMALIVACA

by A.J. SEYMOUR

Dear Ann & Joan & Margaret,

Your faces were full of a wide-eyed and shining wonder when I told you the beginning of the story months ago, and I think it was that wonder that made me imagine how an old blind poet John Milton who lived some three hundred years ago might have begun it. To match that wonder in your eyes, he might have said:

No one can tell from what far land he came
Amalivaca, or by what intent
Or whether accident. It is the same
Sometimes, chance or design, when Heaven is bent
Upon her purposes for mortal men
And shapes them as blind instruments of ill
Or good just as the pattern warrants them.

So whether it was chance or his own will
Avalivaca came.

It was a very long time ago, because all the stories seem to agree that Amalivaca came to the land of the Caribs at the time of the Flood. I suppose you know that there is some story of waters covering all the earth to be found in the early history of nearly all nations, and it is fitting that Amalivaca should come in his ark or canoe while the waters were returning from off the earth; because the very name of our country, Guyana, is an Amerindian word meaning "the land of waters" and his story is mixed with our history that depends on too much or too little water on the land.

I would say that he came in the afternoon. You could have seen no land anywhere at the time of the flood—it was all sea and then gradually the level of the waters fell and the mountains of Guyana began to show their heads.

Our friend the poet would probably write:

The circling sun had not yet swung his wheel,
Leaned still his light out of the eastward sky,
The day the fabled spate came to an end
And the mantling flood contracted from the earth.
First King Roraima brought his forehead clear
Towering behind with seaward-looking eyes,

And his broad shoulders emerging from a waste
Of seething waters steel-faced like a shield
Which slowly sank!

Then Kukenaam

And next Wei-assipu—they caught the sun
And Ayanganna, so splendid in its pride
And many a mountain more, whose name to tell
Would make a hoarse deep music and would beg
The storm for thunder.

And while these islands stood

On ocean-hooded, resurrecting land
Amalivaca came.

I can imagine the great canoe coming steadily and powerfully across the sinking waters from the direction of Trinidad. Perhaps Amalivaca wore a towering headdress but I want you to have the sense of his power as he drove the canoe along.

By this time the waters had not dropped sufficiently to discover the channels of the rivers and he had passed over the length of what is the Essequibo, before he came to one of these rock islands we have named as mountains. And he stopped there and did a peculiar thing.

He had on his finger a ring with a stone in it that is harder than rock and to mark his first sight of land again, he took the stone—we would call it a diamond nowadays—and scratched upon the rock. Any one of us would have cut our names perhaps but Amalivaca carved out upon the rock a symbol of the sun which makes things grow upon the earth and of girls dancing to show their pleasure at the fertility of the world.

Men call the place Amalivaca stayed
The Tramen Cliff above Imbaimadai
And there he carved upon the mountain rock
Strange figures of maids dancing in the sun
Shining above them.

And from time to time Amalivaca would stop his canoe and carve these figures and strange emblems upon the rocks. They are still to be seen to this day and men call them "Timehri" but the message he wrote is not always clear and writers are still trying to say what Amalivaca meant. But Amalivaca was not only an artist and he did not spend all his time writing poetry on the rocks, because that is what he made, a special kind of permanent poetry. He wanted to apply his thought to his people.

I hope you will not ask me to tell you where the other Amerindians came from, after the Flood, because the records are not clear on that point. There are different stories, one that four Caribs climbed to the top of a kornoo palm and these the Flood did not reach. And yet another says that Louquo, the God of the Heavens, or Makonaima, the Great Spirit, took pieces of cassava and threw them backwards over his shoulders and a marvellous thing happened. Those pieces of cassava, he threw over his right shoulder changed shape and sprang up as men, and those he threw over the left shoulder became women—perhaps because that is nearer to the heart.

Anyway, the Carib story goes on to say that the world was peopled again and lived in their villages and Amalivaca came among them.

He did many things to help his people. For instance, when the dry land was to be seen, it was found to be very rough, so Amalivaca made the sides of many hills smooth and also the land at the bottom of the hills. And Amalivaca said "What's the good of having a community here and a community there and keeping separate. You must not stay apart. You must visit one another and learn what the other tribe is doing. The best way is always to have a path leading from your village to the river, because the river is your road and for centuries and centuries the rivers will be the only roads in this land. So make your clearing by the banks and the rivers will bear you one to another. You have no future as a people unless you come together and I shall teach you a new word, federate. You would grow apart and think you lived in separate worlds instead of separate rivers, unless you had communication and shared your good ideas one with the other."

One day Amalivaca went out to the edge of the shelters that the tribe used as huts and he saw men planting and asked them what it was they were doing. They told him they were planting arrow wood, to make arrows to protect themselves when another tribe came.

Amalivaca was angry. "How many nights have I not spent talking to you and your wives out in the light of the stars and telling you of Makonaima who made the stars that they should live like sisters in the sky and men that they should live like brothers on the earth. Don't you see that you are encouraging yourselves to war and to fighting by planting this wood. Plant more cassava, you would be planting food to eat, not arrow wood. Arrows will never protect you from the way you feel in your hearts whether or not you win the war with another tribe. You must learn to protect yourself inside, from your own self, not from the outside, with arrows. Your real enemy is inside of you, not without." He warned them too about keeping themselves in close touch with Makonaima, the Great Spirit. A people without religion would always disintegrate, he said, they no longer became willing to make the sacrifices that were necessary for a people to become great and to endure. Because it was only when a tribe or a community cared for him the

individual, that a man gained a sense of purpose and faith in belonging to his tribe.

Amalivaca—what did he look like? I would say that he was not tall, but broad in the shoulders, like that other figure in stories who resembles him, that old Greek, bald-headed and talkative sailor we know as Ulysses. He was very strong and had great powers of endurance. He could go for days on a small meal of cassava and meat or fish.

But I would be sure that he had remarkable, penetrating eyes, the kind of eyes that would be looking at your mind and how it worked through the windows of your own eyes and then, suddenly, you would know that he was not seeing you anymore, because he was thinking deeply on what he saw there.

I told you this story of Amalivaca once before when we were sitting around the dining table but later I found myself wondering whether I shouldn't write the story all down and give it to you as a Christmas present. You see, other girls and boys may want to read it too and there is one reason why this story of Amalivaca belongs to all the children in Guyana and to children living in other places too. The men who study these matters and who have written great heavy, brown-covered books with gold lettering on them, tell us that the name Amalivaca is found sprinkled all over the Caribbean sea, an area of some thousands of square miles. It keeps cropping up in the legends of the Caribs that a mother tells her children while the sun is going down to put them to sleep, and now and then she would add, "Now dear, go to sleep and Amalivaca will watch over you."

So perhaps Amalivaca did exist long, long ago and we're taking scraps of stories that the Caribs have left, perhaps some in Antigua and some in Belize and knitting the fragments together. This is just another piece of unrecorded history that the Amerindians have given to us here in Guyana. It has come down by word of mouth and been mingled with so many children's dreams.

While Amalivaca was with the Caribs in Guyana he was asked to help with the tides. As a result of the great flood, the rhythmic action of the tides had been affected and there was only the current of the river flowing down to the sea.

Amalivaca taught them how to make canoes, how to select certain trunks of trees and hollow them, mainly by fire, and then shape them into instruments of grace and power upon the water.

Then certain men complained to him how difficult it was to paddle against the current of the river. Could he not make the current to flow up river on one side while it was flowing down on the other. They say that Amalivaca toiled mightily but for all his skill, he could not do what they asked. Then he remembered the sea and he caused the tide, so the story goes, to flow up the river many miles and as it does to this day. But the rivers said "Should the tide go higher, all will be covered again."

So Amalivaca ceased from his labour. There is a picture I have in my mind of Amalivaca brooding upon Kaieteur Fall. I don't know where the picture has come from. Perhaps it's a legacy from the Amerindian blood that is mingled with other blood in my veins—a sort of racial memory—that suddenly finds expression in me after many silent generations. But here is the picture. He had gone up the rivers from near the sea and the land had gradually changed its complexion. All had been flat unbroken waste of trees standing sentinel upon the river's banks and then after days the land began to swell gradually into slopes and hills.

And then suddenly Amalivaca was in the other Guyana where the huge cliffs clad in green trees stand at attention on either side of the narrow river ribbon that winds in and out among tall green walls. Every now and then, there would be a crack in the mountain walls and through the cracks, Amalivaca could see a second rank of mountains, green clad and standing on parade and behind them again more mountains.

Up the narrow river bed Amalivaca travelled and then, with a twist in the ravine, there was Kaieteur, falling in ceaseless flood with a continuous white foam breaking like modern gun-fire smoke at the bottom of the fall.

In the picture that my Amerindian racial memory paints for me, Amalivaca has climbed to the top of the fall and is on the plateau looking down at this ceaseless vast plunge of water that has continued until the plunge seems an almost stationary act through the centuries.

And brooding upon Kaieteur, Amalivaca is moved. Not many of his sayings have come down to us but his sole companion on the Kaieteur escarpment has left enough for us to realise that Amalivaca, looking upon Kaieteur was moved to a sense of the littleness of man before his Maker, and the futility of existence without Him. The few fragments we possess of this part of the sayings of Amalivaca bear some resemblance to the sermon on the Mount given by a Greater than he.

Amalivaca seems to have referred to some great sin that the Amerindian nation had committed in pre-history days—mention of which is carefully removed from the sayings—and he prophesied how the nation would gradually decline and sink into the position of an universally inferior people. The land of waters, Guyana, would become the home of peoples from all the continents of the world, some coming as conquerors, some as slaves. And Amalivaca prophesied that for hundreds of years these different races would live side by side until they learnt, through joint disaster and catastrophe, to live together.

Proudly the sayings went on to tell of the fact that in the very dim future the whole world would look at Guyana and its races living together amicably and take a lesson from the country to apply to its own war-torn breast. Then and then only, said Amalivaca, would the Great Spirit wipe out the sin that the Amerindians had done and that had

driven them out wandering from their original home in China, near the Russian borders, to this Caribbean sea.

This part of the sayings of Amalivaca has come in for much criticism from all as being the utterance of a visionary and some have called it worse, but it must be set down with the others in this story.

Amalivaca also knew about music, it is claimed. To this day, there is a large hollow stone on the plains of Maita outside a cavern where he lived and the older Amerindians used to call it an instrument of music—the drum of Amalivaca. His brother Vochi has also left some tales of the wildwood wisdom of Amalivaca and the knowledge he had of stars to guide through the forest and across the sea and of herbs to help sick ones that he knew the magic of, in the forest ways.

Finally, there is the legend of his growing wisdom in the Guyana region, for he knew all things, and how one day some Amerindians came to him in a strange approach and said that they wanted to worship him as one of their gods. This made Amalivaca very angry and then very sorrowful and he told them that they had not understood what he had told them. So he would have to go on to another place and teach the same things to the people there. So one evening at sunset the Amerindians in the villages nearby came to the edge of the river to bid him good-bye. They knew they would see Amalivaca no more and their hearts were heavy as he climbed into the great canoe and began pulling powerfully away from the bank out to sea, out to where the sun was setting, down in the west.

His headdress waved in rhythm as he bent forward and back at the paddle and the canoe steadily grew smaller. Then it seemed to them on the bank that the canoe was heading right into the sun and it became a mere black speck against the huge red gold disk of the sunset. Then, suddenly, the speck was gone and the gathering darkness thickened slowly over the empty heaving waste of waters.

And that is why to this day Amerindians say that Amalivaca went back into the sun, from whence he had come.

REFLECTIONS ON THE ART OF STANLEY GREAVES

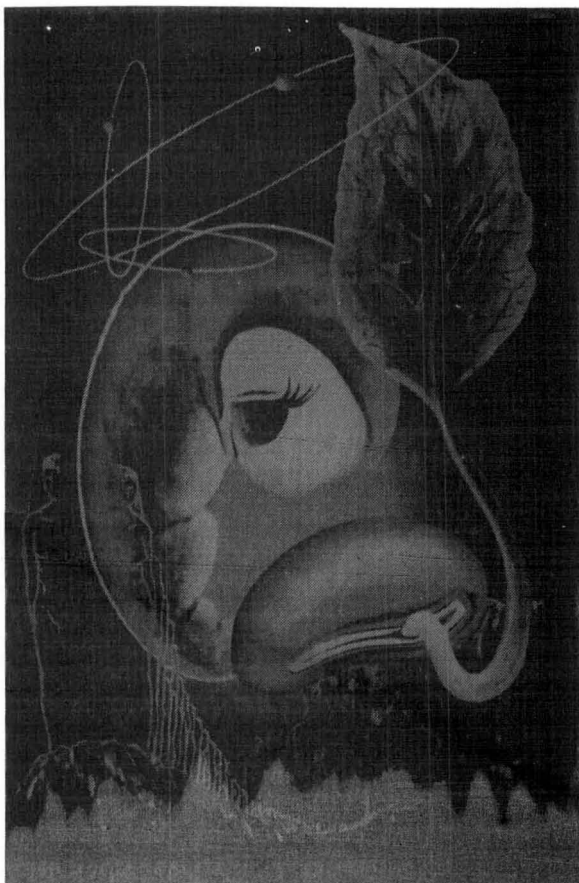
by RUPERT ROOPNARAINÉ

In real art theory does not precede practice, but follows her. Everything is, at first, a matter of feeling.

Wassily Kandinski

I remember almost to the day when a painting of Stanley Greaves' first burned itself into my mind. It was a late afternoon in August 1960, over a quarter of a century ago, when I first encountered "Evolution", a painting in the collection of Dr. Frank Williams, a discerning and early supporter of young Guyanese artists. Unframed, it was affixed to the Northern wall of an airy, elegant drawing room in an old plantation house at Cove and John on the East Coast of Demerara. I recall having been told that it represented the painter's response to H.G. Wells' *Outline History of the World*. I may even have been told even then that it was a response to a particular page of that book.

It could have been the big green eye, innocent of expression with its perfectly curved lashes, looking back at me from the head of the foetus in the exact centre of the picture. Or the single giant leaf, going dry and brown at the edges, surprisingly tattered considering the supple strength of its stem curling like the neck of a bird from out of the white lips of a smooth, round,



EVOLUTION

green seed. But it was not the eye of the foetus nor the leaf of the seed that I remembered, but the long curving column of human figures, in perfect perspective, tiny in the distance, tall and looming on the crest of a rock in the left foreground. The column originated out of a hole in the side of a craggy mountain: slash of bright red deep in the dark. The figures are in simple yellow outline, without detail, except for the first two where there is detail enough to distinguish man and woman. And in the top left of the picture, three orbital rings each with an astral body in motion. The largest of the rings loops around the sharp tip of the leaf. The rings are white, as is the outlined curve of the back of the foetus that is the segment of a fourth inter-locking ring.

It is Greaves' meditation on a page of Wells. And it is very much the young painter's enthusiastic homage to Salvador Dali and Hieronymus Bosch. And over the years, Dali has remained for Greaves the grandmaster of technique under whose hand everyday objects were transformed into luminous symbols. In the work of Bosch he was to make contact with the power of the sense of dread and to understand its regulation by the phantasmagoric image.

In all the years of remembering Guyana away from Guyana, it was this painting, first seen on an August afternoon in the countryside, that would bring the old house and much of the essence of Guyana back into my mind. I was to see it again twenty years later—it is still there, gracing the Northern wall of the old house—and I have come to realise that it had been, that afternoon, the first time that any painting at all had had such an effect and was to lodge such clear traces of itself in my mind. "Evolution" was painted in 1955, during the period of Greaves' apprenticeship and earliest investigations. Looking at it now, in the company and the context of his other works of that period, I am struck by the extent to which all these works, and indeed all the subsequent works in the full variety of their subjects, forms and materials, can be seen to constitute a world, an imaginative universe with its own internal laws and rhythms, its own codes, its own distinctive aura. An imaginative universe renewing and enlarging itself in a restless dialogue with the real world of men and women and nature. Every exchange recomplicates the disposition of the elements of the imaginary world. The really important exchanges—and some are far more important than others—alter the very bases and parameters of the enquiry. On those occasions a kind of leap takes place, and a seminal work comes into the world.

Taken all together, his sculpture, ceramics, carving and painting, from the early 1950's to the present time, are best understood as moments of one global project, aspects of one imaginary world. In this sense, an artist's world is something more than the accumulated output of work. It is not in the first place a matter of quantity: a painter of a hundred paintings, by virtue of that impressive volume of production alone, has not necessarily created a world; whereas, in their complex of

inter-relations, the 20 pieces of another may constitute just such a universe. Although, in the case of Greaves, it is worth noting that we also happen to be discussing a large volume of work produced consistently over more than thirty years. Greaves' work invites us to view it as a totalised unity within which variety and difference abound, but always inside the boundaries that circumscribe and enclose the world. With seemingly infinite scope for internal experimentation and refinement, its investigations unfold within a specific space of enquiry which may expand or contract, but which exists always in strict relation to a fixed centre. Open to external influences, whether formal and artistic (like the Mexican Jose Clemente Orozco) or psychological and philosophical (like C.S. Jung), it draws these into its system to be absorbed or rejected as its laws allow. The Greaves world is a particular world with its own compulsive theoretical and technical preoccupations, its own atmosphere, its distinctive fauna and flora that are ruled over by its own black sun. It is systematic, this tight network of mobile elements at home and at play with all the other elements of the whole. It is a zone that is immediately recognisable on entry. His is the art of totalising impulses, powered by a narrow yet inexhaustible range of obsessions. The world of Greaves is marked by seriality and repetition, by reflexivity and self-allusion, and by the restless pushing outwards of frontiers from a centre that is fixed and still.

"Askari", ("Ancestral Images No.4"), a 20" x 16" colour woodcut, is a reduction print, one of a series that Greaves executed in 1979-80 during a period of formal study at Howard University.

A boy is sitting in the middle ground, slightly to the right of the print's centre. Around his head enigmatic shapes hover and swirl, shapes of masks/faces/shields/spears/leaves. The shield-faces are heart-shaped and anticipate the explorations of the late 80's. There are six of them, grouped in three pairs. Another pair of faces looms in the left foreground. These, like the small boy's, are depicted in considerable detail, amounting even to expressiveness in the face closest to the spectator, as it watches over the scene, protectively. It is the figure of the mother. The other face, her companion's is in sharp profile. Mother, companion and child are the only figures depicted in a naturalistic way: the head-tie of the mother is one such naturalistic detail. These three humans exist on the plane of reality. They are of this human world. The other three pairs that occupy the entire space above the boy's head are abstracted, sexless, and are not of this world. They are organised in ascending order, each pair larger than the one preceding. While the first two pairs are the same way up with the points downward, the final pair are head to toe: the second of the two, or the last of the six, is inverted and more like a leaf/spear. In a picture full of eyes, the boy's face is eyeless. Instead, two eyes are off to the left and right of his face, one brown, the other green. They are closed, with teardrops falling from the



ASKARI

right one.

The picture is muted in tone and colour and it has a strange, other-worldly aura. For this ancestral study Greaves has chosen yellow ochre, green and brown. Brown, the darkest and last to be applied, tinges everything. The final brown asserts the relation of this colour with the yellow and green. As we shall see, it is entirely in keeping with the integration of Greaves' world that it is the identical palette used three years earlier in the "Canecutters" of 1977. The mysterious power of "Askari" is partly accounted for technically by the tension between activity and passivity, business and repose, experience and innocence, that is the informing principle that structures the print. It is a picture about receptivity, about receiving and absorbing from the forces of knowledge the energy and guidance human beings need if they are not to flounder in the confusion of the world. The picture dramatises the externalisation of the desires of the self and the journeying inward of the self's experience. The figures, some of which appear stern and menacing, that hover around the head of the small boy are the ancestors, the truth-bearing



PREACHER (Detail)

ready to melt back into it in the twinkling of an eye. They are at home. Where the ancestors dwell, all is harmony and immanence. Theirs is that epic place that was before the fissure of self and world. This idea of a complete fusion with the environment of life, the dissolving of lines of separation, is central to many of Greaves' most important paintings. It is dramatically expressed in the seminal "Canecutters" of 1977: the labourers are themselves smudged with the ash of the burnt cane, subhuman stalks emptied of individual identity, indistinguishable from the burnt out cane they have produced and become. "*Fore-day morning' on 1 December (1905) found the Ruimveldt factory grinding. It began to consume coals, cane, and human labour from 4.00 A.M....*" Thus Walter Rodney, writing on the 1905 Riots and expressing in that play on "consume" a similar idea and understanding.

It is not surprising to find the signs of so many of Greaves' established themes and permanent interests inscribed in "Askari". We have not mentioned his deep and long-standing interest in African origins nor sought to explain the significance of the Askari's curious social location in the activities of penetration and conquest. Who were the Askaris? They were the African tribesmen who accompanied the white hunter on his safari, first guiding him to the quarry and then providing the ultimate protection, even at the cost of their own lives. Should the white hunter come under attack, his Askari would if necessary place himself in the path of the charging animal. The Askari was the white hunter's hunter, his eyes and ears and right hand. He was in fact his guardian.

Importantly, "Askari" is a reduction print, end result of a process of production uniquely well-suited to Greaves' interest in the ethics of production. The printing of each successive colour means a reduction of the actual printing surface of the block. The first colour established will

spirits through which we connect with all we have been, all that we are and all we can become. The mother-figure draws her power and authority from them, graphically expressed in the sweeping lines that connect her to them. It is a small boy who is receiving the ancestors, not a grown man.

The young boy, innocent, open, usually at the foot of an elder, is a recurring figure in the early paintings.

"Askari" expresses and celebrates the guardian aspect of the ancestral spirits. It is a study on the theme of guardianship. These wraiths are one with the forest, arising out of it and

therefore establish the number of prints that can be made. Once completed, the edition cannot be repeated. Because the printing block is progressively emptied/consumed/destroyed in the process, *the final prints are the only prints*. It is, from within the very process of production and reproduction, the assertion of the authority of the original, of its "aura", in the age of mechanical and electronic reproduction. The print of "Askari" which is before me as I write is number 8 of the 10.

It is easy to understand Greaves' attraction to the reduction print as a process of labour, with its delicate wood-carving and the sensual contact with tools and materials it requires. The streaks in some areas of the picture and the sharp, hard angularity of the edges are accounted for by the particular type of block that was used. Unlike the "Ancestral Images No. 3", another reduction print of the time, which was made from a linoleum block, "Askari" was printed from a plywood block. The streaky effect and the hard, sharp edges (even of the circles and curves) were *imposed* by the grain of the plywood.

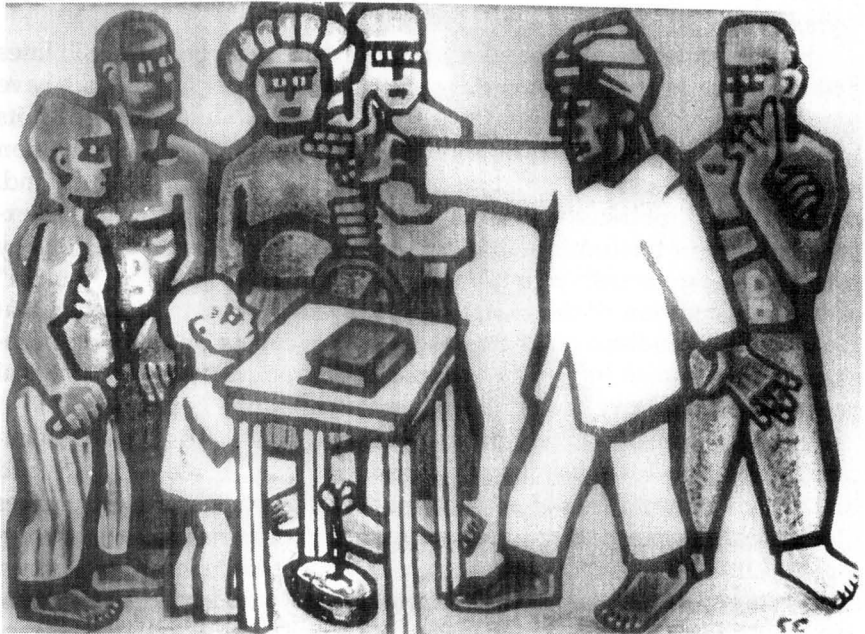
He would have been drawn also to the restricted colour possibilities that brought the exacting monochromatic ideal closer. It would have been no less a question of rigour and limits. Most importantly, with its built-in immunity to commodification (mass-production), the reduction print "Askari" raises the question of artistic morality and takes a stand. In the terms of political economy, the reduction print confronts the exchange-value of the commodity with the use-value of art. It does this by setting limits to its own reproducibility. Reduction prints like "Askari" invite consideration of the antagonism between the abstract labour that produces commodities for the market and the concrete labour that produces art for human fulfilment. From the standpoint of classical political economy, "productive" and "unproductive" labour, respectively.

Greaves' versatility is for me a source of constant wonder. Academically trained in sculpture, he has given free play to his curiosity and delight in adjacent and not so adjacent disciplines: steel welded figures ("Ancestral Figures", "The Cage is the Bird", both of 1980); wood carvings ("Little Man", 1970, "Orissa", 1976); ceramics, pottery, prints, mixed-media objects ("Amatuk Waterfall", 1967—mahogany, aluminum and formica; "Flayed Culture God (Xipe Toltec)", 1970—mahogany, canvas, wool and wire; "Diamond Box", 1970—mahogany, glass, plaster and paint; "Timehri" and "Dancing Figures", 1974—wood, painted tin, and wire; and so on). In the mixed-media pieces, he is drawn to the idea of tension produced by the interaction of the different materials. It is, in the realm of material, a proposition about the unity of opposites. We will see how, at certain key moments of his investigations, the resolution of some sculptural problems will demand that particular equilibrium of forces exerted among different materials when they are brought into relation one to the other.

We can do little more at this stage than take note of Greaves' range

of skills and his mastery of many modes and processes. For the purposes of this paper, I will confine my remaining observations to the paintings. I have used the word "investigation" on more than one occasion to indicate the intellectual curiosity, that sense of theoretical restlessness that is at the heart of Greaves' project. Note the tenacity with which he sets out, in the paintings of the 1950's, of which "Preacher" and "Beggar and Urchin" are typical, to resolve certain problems which begin, or at any rate which propose themselves initially, as problems of technique.

I have in mind here the problem of the outlining of the figures. In a practical sense, this is the challenge Greaves sets himself in these early paintings. In one of the few commentaries on Greaves' work, Basil Hinds, that diligent servant of art, called these paintings the "People of the Pavement" series.



PREACHER

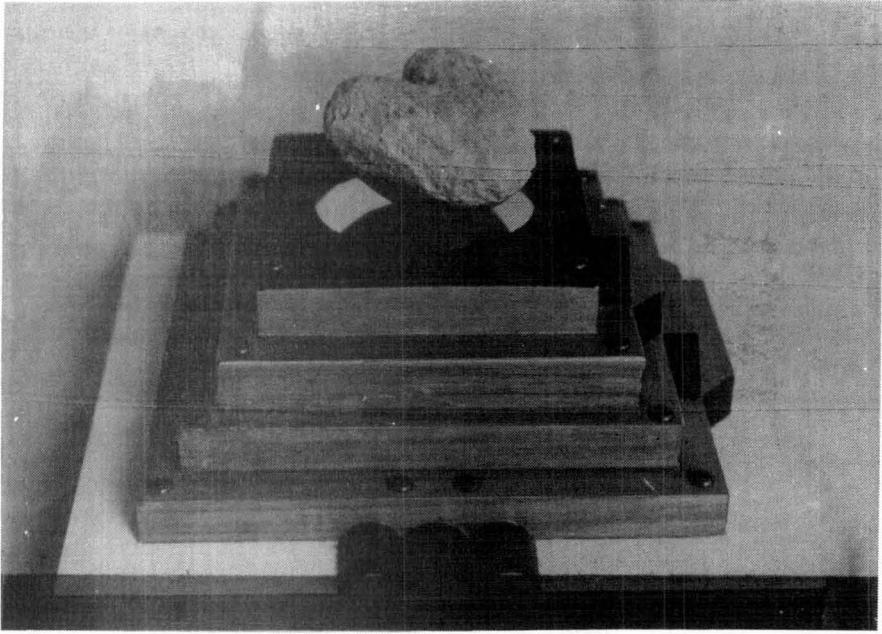
In painting after painting, notwithstanding the undoubted variation of scene, action and characters, nor the differences of strength and tone and emphasis, the essential and original problem of the outlining of the figures is pursued with what we have come to recognise as Greaves' unusual persistence. This problem will eventually resolve itself in two ways, or better, in two forms: into considerations of the edge, as in "Canecutters", "Black Beetle" (1977), "Channaman" (1978). And, secondly, into propositions about the inter-connectedness of people with the space they inhabit, about the dissolving of the lines of separation and difference that stand in the way of oneness and community. So what

began as a matter of technique has revealed itself a matter of vision. In the best sense, Greaves is a painter of ideas. Not a thesis painter. Because the intellectual investigations are rooted in the soil of form and technique and spring from it. And because nothing is forced.

A brief and preliminary observation on his use of colour. It was not until his second period—through the sixties and early seventies, up to the decisive "Mazaruni" of 1976—that Greaves began to seriously engage the problems of colour. The early paintings, with their bold reds and greens and blacks, show little evidence of interest in the expressive use of colour. The main problem then, we recall, was the place where colours met, not the colours themselves. Since then, however, colour has played an increasingly important role in his work. He is today working with fewer and fewer colours. It is as though, for reasons of artistic scruple and rectitude, he is in rebellion against the lack of necessity, that terrible anarchy of possibilities which confronts the painter who is free to paint a human face green, yellow, aquamarine. There is even a witticism along these lines in his "Channaman" of 1978, where the Indo-Guyanese channaman's face and hands are bright blue, the colour of Lord Shiva's throat. Currently, in the "Hearts and Diamonds" series, Greaves is experimenting further with the freeing of the colours, allowing them to blend and flow, nudging them here and there, guiding them to mingle and separate as they will. These are no action paintings. More than technique is at stake. Greaves has expressed to me in conversation his ambition to make use strictly and only of the colours of nature—the browns of mud, the greens of ferns, the perfectly modulated greys of a moth's wing. He believes that purely monochromatic paintings are his eventual destination. As in the case of the reduction print, the matter of colour raises questions that go far beyond technique, questions that go to the heart of the artist's relation to his art. The consideration of colour leads to the fundamental issue of the relation between artistic freedom and aesthetic necessity.

His current researches, being pursued with extraordinary single-mindedness in the ongoing "Hearts and Diamonds" series, show that the informing intelligence is more restless than ever. The rhythm of enquiry is quickened by the urgency of the quest for repose. To date, March 1988, there have been nineteen paintings in the series. In 1986 he began to explore the themes of hearts and diamonds in sculptural forms.

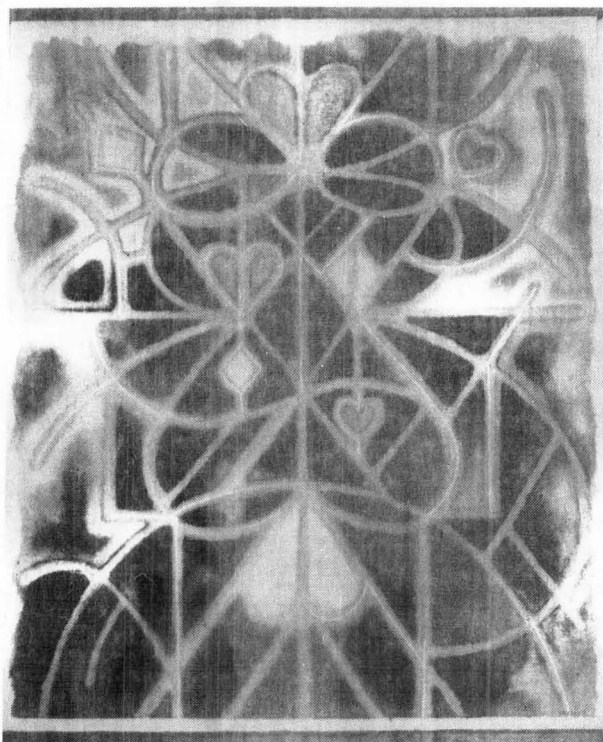
That year he executed 3 Hearts and Diamonds stoneware pieces—2 bowls and a pedestal dish. Also in 1986, the first of the two mixed-media pieces on the theme—a vase with wooden plugs. He continued the following year with several pieces in earthenware—4 dishes and 2 pairs of loving cups. And then, the second mixed media piece—"Pyramid of the Heart" (wood, velvet, mirror glass and coral), proposing a summary and a resolution of problems that had arisen in the course of the sculptural investigations. He had called on the pyramid before, in 1980, at



PYRAMID OF THE HEART

Howard University, the season of "Askari": "Pyramid of Power" (glass and wood) draws together wood and crystal to celebrate that glory of symmetry that the pyramid enshrines.

From the first of the "Tantric Landscapes" of 1985 to the "Mountain of Hearts and Diamonds" of 1987, these are the paintings of Greaves' maturity. There can be no mistaking the mastery of technique, including now the control over the paint. In work after work Greaves expresses his "fascination" with what he identifies as an aesthetic as well as a mathematical principle: "the principle of symmetry (which is) an aspect of harmony." (These quotations and those that follow are taken from the Catalogue Notes of the joint exhibition of work, *HEARTS, DIAMONDS AND FLOWERS* by Greaves and his wife, Alison Chapman-Andrews, held in March 1988 at the Barbados Museum in Bridgetown). Greaves sees these researches extending to related principles: "reflection, refraction, inversion, progression, chance and inferences of infinity." The paintings search out the forms that express "man's need for order and for transcendence." They are to be "looked into", not only "looked at." For all that, these are strange and troubling pictures. The symmetries of Hearts and Diamonds may be grids of order brought down on chaos. Yet the chaos overflows the templates of order. Nor can all their joy of design conceal the spirit's desolation at their heart. In "Mountain of Hearts and Diamonds", high over the radiant mountain side the black sun that held dominion over the landscapes of yesteryear is today's black heart.



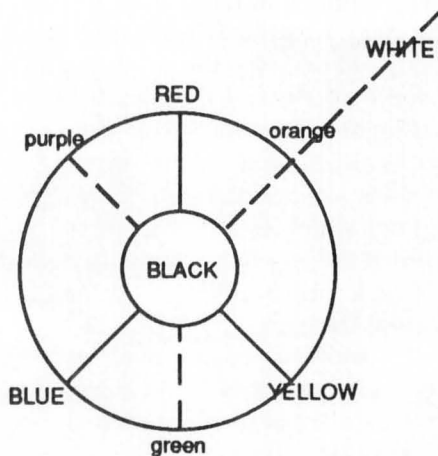
YELLOW HEARTS/WHITE DIAMONDS

What is the source of this dread that haunts canvas after canvas in this extraordinary series of paintings? Take the painting named "Yellow Hearts/White Diamonds". It was painted in March 1985. It is a seminal painting.

Intricate patterns of blue lines of an even thickness stand out boldly from a background of colours used in different tonalities and hues, moving from deep orange to yellow and orange red, and from white to neutral shades of orange. It does not take us long to realise that this is no innocent background. It is nothing less than the depiction, entirely through the use of colour, of the vertiginous space of chaos and contingency.

Whereas the blue of the grid is stable, as befits the primary instrument of order, the orange ranges vertically along the black and white tonal axis, and horizontally along the hues axis from yellow through red to red purple. This is readily seen as soon as we refer to the Newtonian colour wheel.

This mobility of the secondary orange along the vertical (from patches of white to neutral shades) and the horizontal (from yellow to orange red) is in marked contrast to the fixed and primary blue. Orange



is taken through a range of hues and tonalities: in its movement along the hues axis to red purple, it stops at a point where red is a kind of burden of the past and purple a promise of the future. Most significantly of all, orange in its true spectrum aspect is absent from the painting. Orange is *implied* in the tension between yellow and red. It is the occluded middle between yellow and red. It is an orange of the mind. We are in the midst of a methodical exploration. Even as this background of mobile orange signifies the zone of contingency it does so by means of systematic method, raging against disorder within its very articulation.

The grid of blue is brought down on to the pulsing orange. It is not a true spectrum blue. It is a blue whose intensity is held in check by the patches of neutral shades surrounding some of its sections. It has also been lightened by the admixture of yellow. We will return to the dynamics of this blue/yellow discord.

At the level of pure form, the blue lines are both straight and curved, now meeting at acute angles, now describing segments of incomplete circles and ovals. The entire structure rests on the point of a triangle enclosing two smaller triangles with which it shares a base. A parabola, a perfect semi-circle, meets the apex of the large triangle exactly at its midpoint. This point is also the mid-point of the slightly curved segment of the parabola which is the base of another triangle. From the apex of this smaller triangle, two triangles fold outwards to form a diamond. Four hearts, right side up, are blocked in various tones of yellow. Each is outlined or partly outlined in a fine white line that runs along the centre of sections of the blue lines and curves, forcing these sections out further from the canvas. This has the effect of introducing an additional dimension to the blue plane. One heart, blocked in white and upturned, fills the apex of the first large triangle at the bottom, balancing the large yellow heart at the top. Three small diamonds are blocked in white and

again are variously outlined in white lines running through the blue. At the centre of the pattern, structuring it, is a cross, its vertical running from top to bottom and dividing the painting exactly in half; its horizontal, interrupted at the intersecting right angle to accommodate the central diamond, runs straight across the canvas from left to right. The bottom of the picture is a straight line of colours meeting the white of the canvas. The other three sides are unfinished, smudges of colour untidy on the white. The painting, which is four feet high and three feet wide, is a maze through which the eye hunts for pattern and the mind for meaning. The eye comes to rest in relief on the perfect semi-circle crowning the perfect triangle at the base.

"Form alone," Kandinsky has written, "even though totally abstract and geometrical, has a power of inner suggestion. A triangle (without the accessory consideration of its being acute or obtuse-angled or equilateral) has a spiritual value of its own."

As we have seen, the painting is framed on its four sides by a border of the unpainted white of the canvas. And we have seen how arbitrarily the paint meets the canvas at three of the four sides, marking that "erosion of the contours" that has haunted the modern philosophic mind from Nietzsche to the existentialists. But this framing is important for another reason: it establishes the plane (the empty canvas) *above* and *below* which the two other planes of the picture exist. The significance of this assertion of the three planes of the picture becomes clear as soon as we see that the painting itself consists essentially of two planes separated by a *volume of space*. Of what do these planes consist?

First, there is the blue plane, the plane of the grid of order. At the top left and right of the picture, arcs of the blue grid are haloed in white and white tinged with blue and purple. These haloes exist on the same plane as the blue arcs which they surround. So too do the white and yellow hearts and the white diamonds. Two of the yellow hearts and a single white diamond are "complete" as forms of yellow and white. The other hearts and diamonds are intimations, rendered incomplete by the blue lines of the grid that mark them off and divide them.

Then there is the orange plane, the plane of organised chaos. Both the yellow of the hearts and the white of the diamonds are among the colours mingling and spreading on this plane. It is as though the white and yellow have been drawn up through the volume of space that hangs between the planes, to be caught and held in the blue grid of the first plane. A similar movement between the two planes occurs in sections of this second plane, where the dark shades of orange-purple are not allowed to "bleed over" into the adjacent sections. Instead, a discontinuity: patches of light yellow orange, where the light yellow orange is on the first plane. This movement across the space that separates the two planes is the essential dynamism of the picture. It is also the source of anxiety, the space of vertigo. Hence, the reassurance of the borders of

white of the original canvas. It is after all only paint on a canvas surface. We can anchor here. Another important relation between the two planes is that of conflict, expressed by the juxtaposition of discordant colours. Areas where the blue of the grid is adjacent to the red of the background establish one of the two major discords in the painting. The other is the blue/yellow discord, this time occurring at the level of the first plane. The yellows, like the blue, are reduced in intensity. Hence, they are less "disturbing". (Kandinsky: "Yellow, if steadily gazed at in any geometrical form, has a disturbing influence, and reveals in the colour an insistent, aggressive character. The intensification of the yellow increases the painful shrillness of its note.")

Of blue and yellow, the visionary Wassily Kandinsky has further written:

Two great divisions of colour occur to the mind at the outset: into warm and cold, and into light and dark...Generally speaking, warmth or cold in a colour means an approach respectively to yellow or to blue... The movement is an horizontal one, the warm colours approaching the spectator, the cold ones retreating from him....

Yellow and blue have another movement which affects the first antithesis—and ex- and concentric movement. If two circles are drawn and painted respectively yellow and blue, brief concentration will reveal in the yellow a spreading movement out from the centre, and a noticeable approach to the spectator. The blue, on the other hand, moves in upon itself, like a snail retreating into its shell, and draws away from the spectator.

In the case of the painting under discussion, the blue is not permitted to recede. It is held in check by its linearity. Large swathes of blue would have had a tendency to retreat, but *lines* of blue reduce the movement away and into itself. The blue is held even as it strains to leave. This is a point of tension in the picture and resembles in its function the zones of strife where discordant colours meet. This tension is most dramatically expressed in the yellow hearts and white diamonds glowing on the plane of the grid. As we have seen, two of the hearts and one diamond are complete forms of hearts and diamonds. They bear no marks of the grid. The other three hearts and the other diamond are caught and held in the grid, as yet unfree to emerge as final forms. The movement of the yellow began in the depths of the lower plane and moved up through the illusionary space to the upper plane where it is partially held and partially free.

Finally, of the pairs of complementary colours, blue and orange have for Greaves a particular and transcendental resonance. Characteristically, nature is the point of departure: the colour harmony of this paint-

ing was supplied to Greaves by the colours of the macaw, with its brilliant blue back, its breast of brilliant golden orange and the neutrals (black and white) of its head.

The yellow hearts and white diamonds are jewels come up from the deep. The painting suggests that victory over the fear of the abyss may lie in a kind of surrender to it. Within itself, the painting indicates the paths of future exploration: they begin precisely at the points of strife and discord. It is for this reason that I have called this painting *seminal*: it contains its own future.

It would be instructive to trace the evolution of motifs that recur throughout the paintings: the potted plant, the cage, the bird, the foot, the leaf — the simple things of this world which accumulate a radiant power from painting to painting. See how the leaf grows, now alone on a branch, now multiplying, now magically sprouting from a staff. In "Magic Pepper Tree" (1976), leaves spread open like fans, trinities of leaves and branches, and are mysteriously unattached to their branches. Where leaf should meet branch, a hot space, a field of force. In "Big Bread" there are five plants whose stems and leaves are haloed with the same light that glows around the great plaited loaf from which they sprout. In different paintings (sometimes separated by years) each motif, each recurring element, is explored for shape and texture, for colour and pattern. The single bird flying under the great kite, its companion of the air, multiplies into the four graceful spurwings stepping daintily across the water lilies floating in a trench. Then a birdless cage full of the absence of bird. And in "Blackbirds" (1981) there are seven blackbirds sitting in a tree. The seven leaves are caught around the edge of the segment of a circle. Seven leaves to equal seven blackbirds. Or is it seven trees, each with its resident blackbird? In any case, the many leaves in the top right of the picture can stand for all the trees in which blackbirds might sit. It is a cold picture, all greens and black: blackbirds under a black moon, forming patterns, establishing symmetries. Lines from a famous poem of Wallace Stevens' come to mind:

I was of three minds
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

Greaves' concerns in paintings like "Swamp Birds" (1978) and "Blackbirds" (1981) are no less about ways of seeing and imagining and knowing. Again Stevens:

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

This flight into the infinite comes immediately after the stanza that speaks of the blackbird's implication in what the poet knows:

I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

The lines are from Wallace Stevens' 1917 poem: *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*.



BEGGAR AND URCHIN

It would also be useful to examine the pictorial representation of self-consciousness within the paintings, places where the picture reflects on its own processes. Certain of Greaves' paintings are self-reflexive in this sense. This can be seen in the early observer figures.

In "Beggar and Urchin" (1958) he is standing off to the right, hands clasped behind his back, not of the scene, but its essential witness.

In a later painting of the same period, "Beggars", he becomes involved in the scene, an actor in the drama of the street. And see how at the very moment that he stops being a mere witness and joins in the activity of the world, another figure from within the group stares out of the picture, directly at the viewer who in turn is drawn closer to the action.

In the process, the viewer has changed places with the former witness to become the street's latest spectator.

The self-reflexivity is there, in a surprisingly whimsical way for such a serious picture, in the little loaf lying quietly and out of sight under the baker's table where the big loaf is laid out, a perfect little replica of the grand original. "Big Bread", with its religious allegory and private symbolism, was painted in 1971 out of Greaves' experience of his father's dead body laid out on the mortuary table. In its most abstract form, the representation of self-consciousness is there in the white L marking a right-angled intersection in "Jasper Hearts and Diamonds". The white L flaunts the sign's freedom to be a sign in and for itself. It asserts its right to signify nothing beyond itself. Such flashes of defiance from time to time light up the dread zone of perfect form where hearts and diamonds meet.

I have said nothing about Greaves' writing. He has written poems and important essays on the historical development of Guyanese art. He is currently at work on a History of the Guyanese Art Group, having completed the final draft of the History of the Working People's Art Class. I have not spoken of his keen interest in calligraphy and in the making of musical instruments. In this last area, he was a respectful student of the old master, Louis LaRoche.

Greaves' is an exceptional art, passionately committed to the truth of form that is at once the truth of vision.



BEGGARS



THE WEEDING GANG

I end by venturing this: if all other records of modern Guyanese life were to disappear, a study of Greaves' paintings of compassion of the fifties and sixties would be enough to tell us how we lived, what yards and houses we inhabited, what tools our hands held, what musical instruments consoled us, what forms of commerce we engaged in, what hats and pants and dresses and shoes we wore, what leaves and birds and flowers lit up our lives.

It is a splendid human achievement from an artist now at the height of his powers.

And the abstract paintings? Kandinsky, finally:

The more abstract is form, the more clear and direct is its appeal. In any composition the material side may be more or less omitted in proportion as the forms used are more or less material, and for them substituted pure abstractions, or largely dematerialized objects. The more an artist uses these abstracted forms, the deeper and more confidently will he advance into the kingdom of the abstract. And after him will follow the gazer at his pictures, who also will have gradually acquired a greater familiarity with the language of that kingdom.

NOTES

1. Wassily Kandinsky, **Concerning the Spiritual in Art**, Translated with an introduction by M.T.H. Sadler (Dover Publications, Inc., N.Y., 1977). Quotations are from this edition. They are all drawn from Part II, Chapters V and VI: "The Psychological Working of Colour" and "The Language of Form and Colour."

2. In the order in which they arise in the discussion, these are the paintings and objects of Stanley Greaves I have alluded to:

Evolution	Hazel Williams Collection, Guyana
Askari	Aubrey Williams Collection, Washington, USA
Preacher	National Collection, Guyana
Ancestral Images No. 3	Dorothy Taitt Foundation (DTF) Collection
Canecutters	DTF Collection, Guyana
Ancestral Figures	Howard University, Washington, USA
The Cage is the Bird	Howard University
Little Man	Andre Greaves Collection, New York, USA
Orissa	Artist's Collection, DTF
Amatuk Waterfall	DTF Collection
Flayed Culture God (Xipe Toltec)	DTF Collection
Diamond Box	DTF Collection
Timehri	Artist's Collection, DTF
Beggar and Urchin	National Collection, Guyana
Black Beetle	Wilson Harris Collection, London, UK
Channaman	DTF Collection
Mazaruni	National Collection, Guyana
Pyramid of the Heart	Artist's Collection, Barbados
Pyramid of Power	Howard University
Mountain of Hearts and Diamonds	DTF Collection
Yellow Hearts/White Diamonds	DTF Collection
Magic Pepper Tree	Casa de las Americas, Havana, Cuba
Big Bread	National Collection, Guyana
Blackbirds	Artist's Collection
Swamp Birds	National Collection, Guyana
Beggar and Urchin	National Collection, Guyana
Beggars	National Collection, Guyana
Jasper Hearts and Diamonds	DTF Collection
The Weeding Gang	National Collection, Guyana

MUSIC IN PORTUGUESE LIFE IN BRITISH GUIANA

by SR. M. NOEL MENEZES, RSM

As one writer noted: "The Portuguese are a small nation with a vast history".[1] This vast history embraced the most renowned achievements in navigation and it is not too far-fetched to observe that Portuguese navigators could be considered the astronauts of their day. One fruit of their discoveries was the wooded island of Madeira, 535 miles from Lisbon, discovered by João Gonçalves Zargo and Tristão Vaz in 1419. With Portugal in the fifteenth century enjoying internal peace and stability, a nation on the tip-toe of adventure, outward-looking and dynamic, Prince Henry the Navigator gave Gonçalves and Vaz full support in carrying out the *povoamento* —the peopling of an uninhabited island,[2] which by 1500 became one of the most productive sugar producers in the world.

Since the legendary history of Madeira began with a love story, an adventurous tragic drama, drama seemed to become an integral part of the life of the island. Every writer of Madeiran history portrays that fascinating story of Robert Machim and Anna d'Arfet who, after eloping from London and driven off their course to Normandy by a storm, landed on the wooded island where they eventually perished. The English connection was more firmly and historically established by the Treaty of Windsor in 1386. There was more drama in the 17th century when Madeira almost became part of Britain's possessions in Catherine of Braganza's dowry on her marriage to Charles II. From then on special facilities were granted to English settlers on the island; by the end of the seventeenth century British factories, mostly wine, were established on the island. More exciting drama was played out in the early nineteenth century with the occupation of the island by British troops during the Napoleonic War as the island had gained much strategic importance.

The repercussions of the constitutional struggles in Portugal, the decline in the sugar trade with the consequent increasing poverty made emigration for the hard-pressed Madeiran peasant a necessity. In the 1830s and 1840s emigration to the Madeiran seemed the key to livelihood and possible prosperity. The movement of these people from their small island home across the ocean to many distant lands was the main drama of nineteenth century Madeira. The outward-looking nature of the Portuguese had been nurtured by their history of maritime enterprise and high adventure into the unknown, a movement immortalized in the epic poem of Luis de Camoes, *The Lusiads*, published in 1572—a saga of Portuguese discovery, exploration, expansion and dissemination of culture.

Yet in the 1830s the Madeirans, descendants of these adventurous

explorers, were pushed more by necessity than by romance to seek the shores of far-off British Guiana to work on the sugar plantations soon to lose their cheap, steady and continuous labour. Early reports of these Madeirans high-lighted their industry and their cheerfulness.[3] Too "imprudently laborious" they soon suffered from sickness and death through fevers, dysentery and diarrhoea.[4] As better and more sanitary accommodations and improved medical assistance were provided, deaths decreased as one gets a more delightful picture of these emigrants; they dance and sing as the vessels dock in Georgetown and "on their arrival at the depôt of Plantation Poaderayen [Pouderoyen] they begin to tune their guitars, and a general dance follows...."[5] The inherent love of music, which later became expressed in the establishment of musical bands in the colony, was one of the characteristics of the Madeirans, unfortunately down-played and mostly ignored.

Historical accounts of the Portuguese in British Guiana over-emphasized their economic prowess; they became labelled as the notorious rum shop, provisions shop and dry goods shop owners who carried on cut-throat competition which severely undermined the economic growth of other ethnic groups. Mannie, the ubiquitous shop-keeper, became a term of opprobium. It is hoped that this article will offset this long-held view and indicate that the Portuguese played their part in the development of aesthetic life in British Guiana, side by side with other Europeans and coloureds.

FOLK CULTURE OF MADEIRA

Bronkhurst noted that "The Portuguese, not only made British Guiana, a SECOND HOME, but a SECOND MADEIRA." [6] This was particularly noticable in the transmission of their culture, especially in the line of music and drama. As a Madeiran historian noted, "...music gives a certain polish to the most inferior stations in life". [7] Most Madeiran peasants played a guitar of some sort, the machete or the *rajão*. [8] It was their custom to sing while labouring on the sugar plantations and crushing grapes in the vineyards, composing the words of the songs as they went along. Many of the songs were imbued with a *saudade*, a state of longing, nostalgia for a person or place—an attribute which would be most noted in the songs and music of the emigrants. In Madeira, "all the trappings of a fully developed high culture" [9] co-existed with a vibrant folk culture, expressed, above all, in folk literature (contos-*tales*) and in folk songs (ballads) together with folk music, involving folk instruments and dances performed in bright coloured costumes.

This folk culture of the Madeirans—an outpouring of song and dance—became an integral part of their religious celebrations, their *festas*, in their adopted land, so much so that the English priests, unused to

that type of exuberance in church, branded their faith as a "Madeiran type of Catholicism".[10] This love of music, in song and dance as well as their penchant for drama, did not remain confined to church celebrations. Not long after the Portuguese had secured some economic stability they turned their attention to the arts. The desire to launch out in the fields of drama and music would have been stimulated by a social need to form closer links within their ranks, the need to play together, not only work together, a need that is always the more acute when people find themselves in an alien land with an alien culture. In 1854 they formed a group of Portuguese Amateurs and gave an Amateur Dramatic performance in aid of the Girls' Orphanage run by the Ursuline Sisters. The press noted that this was the first effort of the Portuguese in this field.[11]

It was by no means the first effort of the Madeiran Portuguese in the field of the aesthetic and fine arts. Since the eighteenth century academies of various types had been established in Madeira—the *Academia Real das Sciencias* (1779), *Sociedade Funchalense dos Amigos das Sciencias e Artes* (1821) mirrored on that of the *Academia Real Sciencias de Lisboa*. Nineteenth century cultural life in Madeira became a microcosm of Portugal's.

The Madeirans in British Guiana introduced their culture into a very Anglo-Saxon milieu. By the mid nineteenth century a number of Portuguese had made their fortune in the colony. Some of them returned to their island home to spend it; they lavishly distributed charity to beggars in Funchal and the villages, and donated large subscriptions for a feast or public entertainment both in the city and in their own parishes. They were termed by their Madeiran compatriots—"Demararistas". The novel life of the Madeiran *retornado* intrigued the famous dramatist/writer Snr. Dr. Alvaro Rodrigues de Azevedo. In 1859 he produced a drama, *A Familia do Demerarista*, loudly acclaimed in the Madeiran press which stated that the name of its scholarly author was sufficient recommendation for the work.[12] When the play was produced in Funchal in 1860 it was considered "*um triumpho certo ao autor e actores*".[13]

It would be no exaggeration to state that the expansion of the Catholic Church in British Guiana contributed to the growth and development of the cultural activities of the Portuguese community. At the same time the success of the cultural performances contributed very financially to the growth of the Catholic Church. It was already noted that the proceeds of the Portuguese Amateur Dramatic group were for the benefit of the Girls' Orphanage. The majority of performances was in aid of some charity or church. Joel Benjamin, quoting Holmes writing in (1831) and Schomburgk in 1840, indicates that though theatres had been in vogue in British Guiana in the early part of the nineteenth century they did not play a vibrant role in Guianese cultural life.[14] There seemed to be a

turn in the tide in the late 1850s and in the 1860s, which saw the establishment of the Athenaeum where a number of plays was performed, the Assembly Rooms and the Philharmonic Hall. Cultural societies, both musical and dramatic, mushroomed and the latter half of the nineteenth century was marked with a rash of plays, balls and concerts both sacred and secular. Side by side with other amateur and professional groups the Portuguese entered the cultural stream of music and drama in the Guianese society.

In 1869 the Georgetown Philharmonic Society secured the services of Dr. O. Becker as their conductor and encouraged him to open under their auspices a music school, the Demerary Musical Institute, similar to the conservatories in Europe and America.[15] Before this Institute got under way, a Portuguese artiste, Miss Mary Christina De Vasconcellos, held a Grand Concert of Sacred Music in the Assembly Rooms, built in 1857, which became the scene of innumerable concerts, theatrical performances and balls until its demolition by a disastrous fire in 1945. The second sister, Mary Amalia De Vasconcellos was also a noted singer and featured on the programme of 8th March 1869 together with Dr. Becker. The items on the programme illustrate the classical type, mostly Italian works, of their selection, viz.:

1st PART

1. Introduction by the Band
2. *Qual Giglio Candido*, Solo from Mercadante
(by Miss Mary Christina De Vasconcellos)
3. *Loetantum Coch* - Solo Offertorie
(by Miss Mary Amalia De Vasconcellos)
4. Duo, Flute and Piano -
(Mr. Vieira and Dr. Becker)
5. *Ego Sum panis*, Duetto - Battorgia
(by the Two Sisters)
6. Finale of the 1st Part by the Band

2nd PART

1. Introduction by the Band
2. *Cujus animan*, Solo from Rossini
(by Miss M. C. De Vasconcellos)
3. *Quittolis*, Solo - Capocci
(by Miss M. A. De Vasconcellos)
4. Duo, Flute and Piano
(by Mr. Vieira and Dr. Becker)
5. *Qui Sedet*, Duetto - Terziani
(by the Two Sisters)
6. Finale of the 2nd Part by the Band

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN

Admission - 4 shillings

To commence at 8

[16]

The concert was all De Vasconcellos; indeed Mary Christina De Vasconcellos was considered the leading artiste in British Guiana, the "prima donna" of her day. The *Colonist*, reporting on Dr. Becker's Second Grand Vocal and Instrumental Concert in the Assembly Rooms later in 1869 noted:

Although it is not usual to name amateurs and criticise their performance, we feel bound to say that Miss Vasconcellos quite sustained her reputation as a singer in the piece ("Miserere" from *Trovatore*) which, too, was en-cored....[17]

ESTABLISHMENT OF BANDS

With Miss Vasconcellos blazing a musical trail in Grand Concerts the Portuguese decided to establish a musical band. Here again they were carrying on a Portuguese/Madeiran tradition. In Portugal band stands were as ubiquitous as churches. They arose primarily in the *Passeio Publico* where royalty rubbed shoulders with commoners and bourgeois on Sundays and the innumerable public holidays. Symphonic concerts, sacred concerts, charity concerts, performances by military bands were all heard in the shade of the garden where stood the band stand. Even after the Republican Revolution changed much of that life style the band stands remained in some cities and provincial towns.

On holidays and festival days, rival bands, often perched on improvised stands, strove to outplay each other, frenziedly egged on by groups of supporters who, as often as not, ended up in physical combat, with the wielding of sticks and the eventual transportation to the local hospital for first aid treatment; and the intervention of the Republican Guard to restore peace to its festivities. [18]

Scenes around the stand were not always so turbulent for it was a famed setting for the arrangement of marriages and, as a Portuguese writer so aptly deduces: "Perhaps we would not be here today if our grandparents had not fluttered an eye, had not exchanged an acquiescent smile, while up there on the band-stands the bands played on..."[19] Madeira also had its *Passeio Publico* as well as its *Praça da Constituição*

where on Sundays and holidays the bands played, "the people listened, promenaded, talked, debated and flirted from afar." [20] Though every village did not have a band stand every village had its band of local musicians.

In this tradition "an influential body of Portuguese gentlemen" in British Guiana founded on 1st December 1876, a musical band to which they gave the name of the *Primeiro de Dezembro* in honour of the anniversary of the day on which Portugal threw off the Spanish yoke—1st December 1640. [21]

Its members were already members of a charitable association and it seemed that one of its aims was to develop a more "useful and beneficial organization." [22] They promptly sent off the Europe an order for a batch of musical instruments. This band grew and flourished, at one time having over 200 subscribing members and 30 bandsmen. It played at every known festivity in the colony. No church celebration was complete without the sweet music discoursed by the *Primeiro de Dezembro* band. It played on the Sea-Wall, in the Botanic Gardens, the Promenade Gardens, the City Hall, the Assembly Rooms, the Philharmonic Hall, at weddings, galas, bazaars and balls; there was no excursion organized by the Portuguese without the attendance of the Band. One of its most renowned bandmasters, Senhor João Nobrega de Noronha, a former bandmaster of the "Recreio dos Lavradores" band of Camara dos Lobos, a fishing village in Madeira, was a talented musician who played the flute, clarinet, violin and piano among other instruments. [23]

The Band always observed their anniversaries in grand style. On their eleventh anniversary postponed one month later they celebrated at Belfield at the home of the well known Portuguese racing enthusiast, Mr. Luis Fernandes. "After a sumptuous dejeuner," reported the *Daily Chronicle*, "and some lively airs were discoursed the band marching through Victoria Village at intervals of about an hour... gave the people the full benefit of their musical skill". [24] 1888 seemed a red-letter year for the band; they came under a new baton, that of Mr. John Miller of the Militia Band, and for the first time appeared in their new uniform. These uniforms were quite arresting and made the news:

The tunic and trousers were made of blue-black cloth. A small red seam is on the outer side of each leg of the pants, and the tunic is braided after the style of the tunics worn by the Police Inspectors. On the upper side of the collar band, which is of gold lace, there is a red seam, and the sleeves are also adorned with gold lace. They also wore a peakless cap of the same texture of cloth, the front being marked by a silver ornament plated in gold. [25]

On Easter Monday the smartly turned-out band entertained a large

crowd in the Botanic Gardens from 4 to 6 p.m. with the following programme of music:

PART I.

1. Quick March.... "101" STASNY
2. Polka.... "Kirmess" FAUST
3. Potpourri "Les Huguenots" .. MEYERBEER
4. Waltz..... "Nach des Tages last" FAUST
5. Quadrille.... "Le Mirror aux Belles" BLEGER

PART II.

1. Overture..... "Wallace"... .. BISHOP
2. Mazurka..... "Constance" ... ZIKOFF
3. Selection "Robin Hood" ... BIRCH
4. Polka "Un Ballon d'End" FAUST

It will be noticed from their repertoire—their selections of pieces and composers—that this Philharmonic band was European-oriented in their musical taste. Here was an example of the high culture of their Portuguese heritage. At the same time the folk culture expressed in the rendering of their simple, tuneful and meaningful songs, an integral part of their village life in Madeira, existed side by side with the European adoptions, and could be heard in the strumming of the *rajões* outside the shops and in the houses.

Possibly to express this other side of Portuguese culture another band was established in 1892—the *Estudiantina Resauração de Demerara*. Its concert given in the Town Hall in September 1892 was hailed as "an unequalled success".[27]

It seems that a few years later in 1898 this band was re-organized under the title of the *Tuna União Recreativa Portuguesa* composed of twenty young Portuguese under the baton of Mr. A. Serrão. The band consisted mostly of strings, the flute being the only reed instrument employed. There were mandolins and braggas (a kind of small Portuguese guitar), guitars, cellos and lighter instruments.[28] Such a band was typical of the many bands of young musicians found throughout the island of Madeira, particularly in the villages.

The Estudiantina String Band seemed to have been newly organised in 1898 to correspond with the lavish celebrations planned by the Portuguese to mark the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the sea route to India by the famous Portuguese navigator, Vasco da Gama. 1898 was a memorable year for Portuguese all over the world and the Madeiran Portuguese in British Guiana joined with their compatriots in honouring the achievement of da Gama in a number of activities. The

Primeiro de Dezembro Band played a major role in all events. At a concert held on 15 July—the day of celebration—in the Promenade Gardens, the B.G. Militia Band joined their fellow badnsmen. On this day all Portuguese businesses, even the rum shops, were closed, as the day was earmarked for festivities.[29] It was reported that the performances of the *Primeiro de Dezembro* Band attracted a large audience; on that day they must have excelled in their playing.

This year also the *Primeiro de Dezembro* Band celebrated the twenty-second anniversary and was joined by both the Estudiantina Band and the B. G. Militia in giving a moonlight concert in the Promenade Gardens. At this concert the performance of the Estudiantina Band was “deservedly applauded”.[30] even more noticeable were their picturesque costumes, typical of the Madeiran folk dress. In British Guiana moonlight concerts were a great favourite among the people and these were held in the Promenade and Botanic Gardens and on the Sea Wall, the entrance fee being the princely sum of four cents!

For the String Band the new century brought a new look—the introduction of young ladies who played the bandolins, violins and piano. They were considered the big feature of the vocal and instrumental concert given in the Town Hall on 1 June 1900.[31] They received “unqualified applause” by a large audience. It was especially noted that “The Waltz music by the bandolins was perhaps the most popular item of the evening, the young bandolinistes being Mrs. M. L. Da Costa, Miss. E. Serrao, Miss. V. Teixeira, Miss. M. A. Teixeira, Miss G. Henriques, Miss. M. C. Serra, Miss. J. De Souza and Miss M. P. Gonsalves, piano.[32] A few days later the band, fresh from its success, was again in demand giving a patriotic concert in the Promenade Gardens, this time for the government commemorating the entry of Lord Roberts into Pretoria.[33]

Through the first decade of the twentieth century the band played on. On 1st December 1901 the *Primeiro de Dezembro* Band celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. A letter to the press gave great praise to the accomplishments of this band, showing that over the years its playing powers had been generally recognized and appreciated. However, it seemed that in the last few years, absence from the colony, death and lack of both interest and funds had thinned out its ranks. In 1901 only sixteen playing members remained of whom Mr. V. X. de Silva, the President and Conductor of the Band, was one of the original members; Mr. A. Angelo de Nobrega, the Secretary and Treasurer, had joined in 1881. It was very much hoped that financial help would be forthcoming to purchase new instruments, new uniforms, and new music. Above all the band, claimed to be “the oldest Portuguese institution in the colony,” stood in need of new blood.[34]

Although the band did not really return to its original complement it was still in action, especially delighting the crowds at moonlight concerts and on special occasions. One reads of their performances at a grand

Moonlight Coronation Concert in August 1902 on the Sea Wall to honour the coronation of their Majesties, King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra at which they played a medley of popular English patriotic airs, including "Rule Britannia" and "The British Grenadiers".[35] Although they honoured the British patriotic events they never forget their own and on such occasions the band would entertain the Portuguese Consul or Vice-Consul at his home.

One would have noted throughout the text the observations that the bands played to large audiences, while some reports especially commented on the fact that those large appreciative audiences were composed mainly of the Portuguese community. However, it must not be concluded that only the Portuguese enjoyed those musical entertainments. The moonlight concerts held in the Gardens and on the Sea Wall on special occasions or on public holidays were frequented by the Georgetown crowds, a mixed ethnic group. Comments of a crowd in a happy, holiday mood summed up the merits and de-merits of the Portuguese band as illustrated in this delightful dialogue overheard on the Sea Wall on a public holiday morning. The trams were running fully packed. The scene was described as "a disturbed ants nest but with all the ants in excellent humour". A donkey cart had brought the musical stands for the band and the men had arrived in ones and twos. Shortly after six o'clock the music began and the crowd gathered round to listen and to criticise.

"Dey is not like de Militia," said one. "Dey will neva reach de Militia."

"Oh, dey do very well," said another. "You t'ink is a easy job fo' play music, no? Wha' instrument you can play at all?"

"E can play de fool very well," suggested a third; and there was laughter at the expense of number 2.

The bandsmen also came in for their share of bantering criticism. It was conjectured that the thin one had come "widout 'e tea", while it was agreed that the bass had been made for his instrument.[37]

Whether it was the classical music of the *Primeiro de Dezembro* Band or the popular music of the Estudiantina String Band; whether the music was played at the Town Hall, Philharmonic Hall, Assembly Rooms, Promenade or Botanic Gardens, or the Sea Wall, the Portuguese bands were very much part of the musical scene in the colony and contributed in no small way to the social entertainment of a wide cross section of the population.

NOTES

1. Sarah Bradford, *Portugal* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 7.
2. Francis Rogers, *Atlantic Islands of the Azores and the Madeiras* (North Quincy, Massachusetts, The Christopher Publishing House, 1979), p. 49.
3. Governor James Carmichael Smyth to Earl of Aberdeen, 25 May 1835. N.A.G.
4. Monthly Returns of Portuguese Emigrants—enclosures in Governor Henry Light to Lord Stanley, No.55, 22 November 1841.
5. Mr. James Hackett to Gov. H. Light enc. in No.4, 5 July 1841—*Papers Relative to the West Indies. British Guiana, 1841-42.*
6. Rev. H.V.P. Bronkhorst, *The Colony of British Guiana and Its Labouring Population* (London, 1883), p.101.
7. William Combe, *A History of Madeira. With a Series of Twenty-Seven Coloured Engravings, illustrations of the Costumes, Manners and Occupations of the Inhabitants of That Island* (London: R. Ackerman, 1821), p.77.
8. The machete resembles a small guitar, though it has but 4 strings all of catgut. The most difficult and classical music can be agreeably played on the machete. See Anthony Drexel Biddle, *The Land of the Wine, being an Account of the Madeira Island at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia and San Francisco: Drexel Biddle, 1901), II, 62.
The rajão consisting of five strings is a well-known musical instrument of the Madeirans. It was known as the local guitar in Madeira—"similar to the cavaquinho of the Minho—which was taken to Hawaii where it was adopted as the ukelele. See Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira, "Portuguese Folk Music Instruments", *Atlantis*, Vol. 7, No.3 (May/June, 1987), 33.
9. Rogers, p.391. Over the years high culture penetrated folk culture in what Rogers called "a see-saw movement", p.392.
10. B.G./15 Fr. Walker to Fr. Provincial, 6 November 1861, f.481. Jesuit Archives, London.
11. C.O. 116/16. *The Colonist*, 5 April 1854.
12. *O Direito*, No.1 Quarta Feira, 2 de Novembro 1859. Archivo de Regional, Funchal.
13. *Ibid.*, No.22, Sabbada, 7 de Abril 1860. No evidence has yet been found of this play being produced in nineteenth century Demerara. In May 1985, however, as part of the 150th Anniversary celebrations of the arrival of the Portuguese in British Guiana, the drama, translated by Sandra Grainger, Modern Languages Department, U.G., and produced by the U.G. Drama Group under John Rollins, Division of Creative Arts, was presented over Radio Demerara.

14. Joel Benjamin, "The Early Theatre in Guyana", *Kyk-Over-Al*, No.37 (December, 1987), 30-31.
15. *The Colonist*, 5 February 1869.
16. *Ibid.*, 2 March 1869.
17. *Ibid.*, 28 July 1869.
18. Roby Amorim, "While the Band Played On", *Atlantis*, Vol. 6, No.2 (May/June, 1986), 17.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Luis de Sousa Melo and Susan E. Farrow, *Impressions of Madeira in the Past* (Funchal: Patio-English Bookshop, 1983), p.29.
21. *The Watchman*, 8 December 1876. N.A.G.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *The Daily Chronicle*, 25 January 1893. N.A.G.
24. *Ibid.*, 31 January 1888.
25. *Ibid.*, 4 April 1888.
26. *Ibid.*, 1 April 1888.
27. *Ibid.*, 14 September 1892.
28. *Ibid.*, 9 October 1898. The bandmaster, A. Serrão, was a composer in his own right, conducting five pieces of his own composition. The braggas were played quite admirably by small boys.
29. *The Daily Chronicle*, 16 July 1898. One writer signing himself 'Luso' expressed the hope that Portuguese employees in English business places would also be given a holiday. For said he: "I am almost certain that the English gentlemen will not deny this request knowing especially how England benefited in the discovery of the sea route to India by this illustrious Portuguese sailor".
30. *Ibid.*, 2 December 1898.
31. *Ibid.*, 3 June 1900.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, 12 June 1900.
34. *The Argosy*, 30 November 1901.
35. *The Daily Chronicle*, 17 August 1902.
36. *Ibid.*, 14 March 1888; *The Daily Argosy*, 17 November 1908.
37. *The Daily Argosy*, 17 November 1901.

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN THE POETRY OF MARTIN CARTER

By STEPHANOS STEPHANIDES

1. Introduction

The work of Martin Carter, foremost Guyanese poet and no doubt one of the most distinguished writers of the English speaking Caribbean to date, has been acclaimed both regionally and internationally by critics and scholars.

However, for most readers of literature in the industrial countries of the north, the literature of the English-speaking Caribbean begins and ends with the Trinidadian V.S. Naipaul. It has now been agreed among many critics that a good part of Naipaul's distinction internationally, among equally meritorious Caribbean writers, is due to his negative evaluation of the Caribbean experience. His writing confirms prejudices of the industrial countries of the north regarding the south. Interestingly, his lesser talented brother Shiva, has gained a readership in North America and the United Kingdom but not in his native region. Paradoxically, his novel *A Hot Country*, in which Guyana serves as a model for the fictional country Cuyama, a paradigm of a failed post-colonial society, has never been mentioned to me in Guyana. Shiva Naipaul's novel does little to evaluate the nation's experience through colonialism, slavery, indentureship, and the post-colonial struggle for survival as an independent nation. Perhaps the difficulties and upheavals of transition from colonialism to independence have been felt more deeply and are more visible in Guyana than in the other English-speaking Caribbean nations making it easy prey for Shiva Naipaul's political satire. Martin Carter offers a radically different perspective on the Caribbean experience to the Naipaul brothers. The approach to language and identity separates Carter from the Naipauls. For the Naipauls, man's identity is defined by the negative verdict of his history. They seem ashamed of their Caribbean identity. In antithesis to this attitude Carter explores identity in the ceaseless tension between man's Desire and man's fate, which is represented by Time. For Carter, language is man's key of access to the Desire-Time polarity. In its artistic expression language can articulate man's quest for identity. Carter's work represents a quest for life within and without to reintegrate the individual in a divided social nexus and a fragmented historical experience.

2. Caribbean Identity Viewed in *A Hot Country* by Shiva Naipaul

The novel opens with reference to a history lesson taught in Cuyamese schools, which as in V.S. Naipaul's *The Loss of El Dorado*, depicts Guyanese history as a disappointment from the arrival of the Europeans:

It was told how Sir Walter Raleigh had come to this wilderness. But he had found nothing worth finding—only the overwhelming forest and tribes of miserable aboriginals; men barely progressed beyond the Stone Age; who painted their bodies; who lived off roots and small wild animals; who shot fish with poisoned arrows; who, occasionally, hunted each other's head. He came and went away to be beheaded in the Tower of London.[1]

Later a teacher describes the ethnic variety of Cuyamese. Rather than a sense of the potential of a varied cultural heritage, this causes a response of bewilderment among his students:

So it was that all the people we call Cuyamese came, creating a blend of many peoples, many religions, many cultures. All different and still all Cuyamese.

They looked at him and at each other and did not know what to think or how to respond. (HC. p. 5)

The conclusion of the novel defines the Cuyamese as having no self or soul and no creativity:

But, down deep in their hearts, the mob did not want to create. Creation was not possible for them. (HC. p. 184)

A void. Darkness. Unspecified hunger. That was all they had—their darkness, their hunger. They did not have a self, a soul, to call their own. (HC. p. 184)

3. Carter

Carter is in antithesis to the above view, not because he embraces a facile nationalism or social optimism in the face of the negative legacy of the colonial past and the uncertainty of no straightforward path into the future, but because for him language is a living thing. For the Naipauls language is a dead thing defining a static reality that has no possibility of change. For Carter, language is a means for transformation and an attempt to rescue the human being from a language that institutionalizes its own fragmented subjectivity.

Carter puts language under scrutiny as part of his moral and artistic concern to distinguish between a language which fosters the centering and growth of the human being in the community and the world, and a language which consolidates a world inimical to his fulfillment in conspiracy with time, 'the time', 'our time', the negative verdicts of history.

Language is a valuable tool as it is able to open up the individual's scale of choices. But at the same time it is not innocent; by its very nature it selects, combines, and excludes, creating its own mythic figurations to serve its conscious and unconscious purposes. Carter draws attention to this, beginning his most recent anthology, *Poems of Affinity* with a quote from Heidegger quoting Holderlin "language, the most innocent of all occupations, is the most dangerous of all possessions. "[2] In one of the poems in the same anthology he warns:

As when, as out, and as when as
in, I walk decidingly about
disappear. Watch my language. (PA. p. 75)

Similarly Carter expresses in "Proem" the problematic relationship and dissociation between the speaker/poet and the words/poem and in turn the poem's relationship to reality. The 'rule breaking' device in the poem/proem contrast underscores this and shows poetic language to be endlessly moving from one level of meaning to another as soon as it is established:

Proem

Not, in the saying of you, are you
said. Baffled and like a root
stopped by a stone you turn back questioning
the tree you feed. But what the leaves hear
is not what the roots ask. [3]

The art of Carter, and also the art of Wilson Harris as I have discussed in another essay, embraces the idea that language is a dialogue between two polarities—desire and time, self and history. Implicit in the dialogical nature of language is the possibility of transformation through dialogue with itself and others. In the poem "In a certain time" this dialogue is portrayed by Martin Carter as the hoot of an owl defying the eye of a toad, an animal that is an instrument of black magic and, therefore, spiritual death:

In a certain time I have lingered.
But as an owl hoots
to startle the vile eye of a toad
and initiate its own defiance of dark:
I also speak. (PA. p. 27)

In this context impoverishment of speech comes to signify a breach of faith in one's experience. Carter establishes a link between man's construction of self, his perception of world, and language:

So now/ how come/ the treason of the spirit?
So now/ how come/ the bafflement of speech?
How Come? (PS. p. 94)

An intimate link is suggested here between language and historical memory. Impoverishment of speech is an expression of a sensibility plundered by the negativity of historical legacy. In Carter's "Our Time" a muttering at the bottom of trenches expresses man's incapacity to come into harmony with 'our time'. Our perception of world and identity depends on the struggle between time and being which is paradoxically expressed in the following lines:

The more the men of our time we are
the more our time is. But always we
have been somewhere else. Muttering
our mouths like holes in the mud
at the bottom of trenches (PA. p. 15)

The language of the poet in his affinity with the human spirit is a negative/affirmative dialectic to subvert the jaws of time by a loan of its tongue. In its negation of time, language becomes an affirmation of life:

In
this world time is a snare
and I am masticated
by its jaws. All I could have
and have done was to borrow
its tongue. With that loan
I have gained a mastery
of the language of our negative yes. (PA. p. 31)

Hence the object of the poetic quest is to uncover the potential for being. I say potential because it is a desire in language which is in process. This is attested to by the use of the conditional in the title of the poem "If it were given":

If it were given to me
I would have had a serious conversation
with the fertile dial of the clock of the sun.
But then, I admit, I would have had to change
the language of the dead

I would have had to haunt the cemetery where the living
believe they put away the varnished coffins
which mock them into making

wreaths for themselves and graveyards for their passions
and victories that mean nothing to them
though they win the trophy of life:
that cupped hand of anguish
open for love (but scattering pain
like seeds of padi) in the murdering drought. (PS. p. 90)

The death/sun opposition intrinsically links the nature of language with the nature of consciousness and reveals the poetic quest to be a quest for integration and wholeness whose objective is victory over time. The poet is thus potentially a healer for the individual who becomes locked in his journey towards death through experience of loss and defeat. The sun clock is a counter clock to the time of historical duration or conventional time which leads to death. The operative verbs are "change" and "haunt" making the poet's dialogue a counter dialogue subverting the buried past in an attempt to restore man to his original potentiality. The fertile dial of the clock of the sun, like the Heraclitean flux or the Indian mandala, here becomes a symbol of the wholeness of the inner self which can recreate the fragmented individual or community identity. Carter's is not a poetry of mystical participation, for the ego is not set adrift, but oscillates in its dialogue between polarities—fertile dial, sun clock, life, victory, love versus language of the dead, cemetery, coffins, graveyard, nothing, pain, drought. This tension, often imbued with anguish and torment, is the propelling force behind man's potential to think, feel, and grow. It is the paradox of man's existence that death, which negates life, thus mocking the individual, also gives significance to the act of creation, making life a trophy and victory for man.

"If it were given" in theme and structure can serve as a model for understanding the whole span of Carter's work from the '50's to the '80's. While there is an evolution in Carter's poetic form, there is also a continuity in his underlying concern to explore the potential of poetic discourse to challenge or subvert the compelling pressure of time or the time. This is true whether the oppressor is portrayed as an external agent as in "This Is The Dark Time My Love":

Whose boot of steel tramps down the slender grass?
It is the man of death, my love, the strange invader
watching you sleep and aiming at your dream. (PS. p. 42)

or as our own demeaned sensibilities as in "Our Time":

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

I am not suggesting that there is a clear cut division in Carter's work

or in reality between external agent of oppression and demeaned sensibility. Poems may refer to specific political events, the condition of Caribbean man, or universal man. Oppressors may be removed, new ones may emerge, and history may continue to plunder our sensibility; but the main concern remains man's capacity to tap a source for the renewal of experience.

In his poem "They Say I Am", Carter indicates the source of poems to be in man's cosmogonic yearning; the process of creating true poems means death to the intrusive individual ego:

Poems are written either for the dying
or the unborn, no matter what we say.
That does not mean his audience lies remote
inside a womb or some cold bed of agony.
It only means that we who want true poems
must all be born again, and die to do so. (PS. p.61)

4. Conclusion.

Carter is often referred to as a "poet of revolution". He is that in the broadest sense. In his conception of the wholeness of the human person, Carter's art does not involve a commitment to an unchanging world but explores man's identity as a continuous coming-into-being in the whirlpool between self-destruction and self-creation. In his concern with the paradoxes of language and the imagination, he conceives of poetic language as a catalyst capable of raising man's awareness of his place in the universe and his courage to overcome the contradictions of his time.

NOTES

1. Shiva Naipaul, *A Hot Country*, (London: Abacus, 1984), p. 1. Henceforth referred to as HC.
2. Martin Carter, *Poems of Affinity 1978-80*, (Georgetown: Release Publications, 1980), p. xiii. Carter refers to this quotation as being from Heidegger on Holderlin. In effect it is Holderlin's own words quoted by Heidegger in his essay on Holderlin "Holderlin and the Essence of Poetry". Furthermore, it is two quotes from Holderlin combined into one. The first "language the most innocent of all occupations", is an extract from a letter to his mother of January 1799; the second that language "is the most dangerous of all possessions" is a quote from a study of 1800. See "Holderlin y la esencia de la poesía" in Martin Heidegger *Arte y Poesía* (Mexico: Fondo de cultura economica, 1958.) p. 126, p. 128, p. 129. *Poems of Affinity* is henceforth referred to as PA.
3. Marter Carter, *Poems of Succession*, (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1977), P. 9. Henceforth referred to as PS.

WILSON HARRIS

Extract from an interview with Rovin Deodat
shortly after being awarded the 1987 Guyana Prize for Fiction
on December 8th 1987

(This is part of a longer interview given by Wilson Harris interpreting various readings which he gave at the same time.)

Rovin Deodat —We are very happy to have you with us and to be able to discuss your idea of the novel and your concept of the use of literature in places like Guyana at their particular stage of development. One of the concepts we have been hearing from you is this idea of "marginality". Wilson, you did mention this even at the Guyana Prize presentation. Could we ask you now to give us another look at what you see as "marginal" and the "marginal society"?

Wilson Harris —Marginality is something one can pursue at many levels. But I want to seize on something that people would relate to immediately. Let us take a figure like the porkknocker.

The porkknocker is a figure I encountered in the interior of this country. I don't know if porkknockers still move around in the interior, they used to do when I was a young man. In those days porkknockers could mine on the creeks, they could mine on the banks of a river, whereas now they would need machinery to go deeper inside. There may still be a few floating porkknockers around.

One of the things which interested me about the old time porkknockers was that they would sometimes have names such as "Caesar Augustus", or "Byzantine Emperor", or "the Pope".

I think this came out of their isolation, the profound necessity to create a fiction. But it is curious that they should adorn themselves with the apparatus of major figures of the past and of the present. I don't think that they understood what they were doing but for me it was like a kind of signal coming out of the unconscious of the society.

So, first of all, we see these figures playing these tremendous roles without necessarily understanding the implications of what they were doing, and virtually to no audience because they were living in the interior with perhaps only one or two companions. The next thing is that these porkknockers were living on "the edge" and they lived on a shoestring.

That is what the word pork-knocking implies. You take the barrel with the salted pork and turn it over and you knock out the last scraps of meat because things are bad. Things are hard and you have to go on digging in the creeks but you have to have food, you must scrape all the

time. You may have caught some fish in the river, you may get some wild meat, but it is always scraping.

In the midst of this one could have the most peculiar and strange conversations with these porkknockers in which one sensed a gnawing within. Something was eating away at them. Without fully realising it they were asking questions about why they were here? Why were they doing something like this? And, was it gold they were looking for, or was it something else? There was an element of hallucination, because it can be terrifying to live alone in the Bush. You hear all sorts of whispers and sounds in the Bush. Sometimes the rain is falling far away and just that light drizzle from afar infuses the atmosphere of the Bush with a misty smoke and a misty sound as if fire were running through the leaves. You would hear strange sounds in the forests. I have known men who were unable to remain in the forest even for a single day. There is the case of a man who was left behind in camp when the party went out deep into the forest. Suddenly we heard a terrible drumming. This man had taken up a bucket, climbed a tree and was beating fiercely on the bucket to bring us back. The isolation had gotten to him.

So you have this figure of the porkknocker, and it dawned on me even in those younger days—I could not intellectualise it then, but it was a deep intuition I felt—that this marginal figure was in myself, part of the everlasting stranger in myself. The everlasting stranger in oneself is always a figure out there who has to address one from a position of extremity.

Not only those one sympathises with, but even the people one does not sympathise with! They are all marginal figures, because one could be in their skins at a certain extremity. The point is that when one begins to look at all these complications, suddenly one realises that one has the chance of revising the premises of the great voyagers—Magellan who circumnavigated the globe, the Portuguese navigators who came into the Caribbean. (There were also porkknockers of African descent, Portuguese descent and others). These voyagers, therefore, suddenly seemed to me to become a kind of strange porkknocker.

Remember, these voyagers would be becalmed at sea, their provisions would decline, they would be at "the edge", they would look for a shrimp in the sea or a fish or something to survive. And suddenly it occurred to me that these great museum figures in Europe, these voyagers who had circumnavigated the globe had another value. I began to ask myself what was the value residing in these voyagers? I could't answer it by going to the museum and reading the chronology there—I would get a good historical chronicle but that didn't satisfy me because in those histories these voyagers appeared to be simple technicians—as a man drives a car a man could sail a ship—but is that all that the voyagers were? Then it dawned on me that the concept of the marginal figure, like the porkknocker, could infuse Magellan and others with a new density,

with new roots. The ocean was part of the forest of the mind, just as the forest was part of the ocean of the mind. And you could suddenly sense that these great voyagers would acquire new roots and new density—that is the subversive strategy of *The Infinite Rehearsal*, in that the voyager can no longer sit comfortably on the premises of history. These premises have to be revised because the voyager has been out away from his roots, his roots in which nature had elements in it which could bring disease and malaise. But Nature also has a therapeutic thread running through it, a visionary and therapeutic thread that becomes more illuminating and luminous when one realises the very critical position one finds one self in. Then one has to relate to that thread, as a thread which charges one's civilisation with meaning. Otherwise you will simply succumb to the disease, to the malaise, to the deformation. That could easily happen if people are pushed into a marginal situation where they seem irrelevant to the civilisation.

People do become irrelevant and the fodder for authoritarian regimes which may harness them to do this job or that job or which may imprison them or treat them as doomed creatures. But the civilisation is impoverished when it does that.

On the other hand, in a more positive sense, you begin to imbue the great voyagers with a new density and new roots. One interrogates the building blocks of a civilisation. Those voyages were immensely important. It does seem to me if we are to understand their value we may paradoxically do this from an extreme or marginal position.

Rovin Deodat —Wilson, I think one can take this one step further, but before I do that let me ask you something that has been bothering me. I think I now understand this concept of marginality and as you said maybe here we have the building blocks of a new civilisation, maybe another movement in the history of mankind. But how conscious must the people who are involved in this new movement be of their own roles as marginal people for that to succeed? You were saying for example that the porkknockers were unconsciously so, the voyagers were unconsciously so. Is there an imperative in history which would push them towards something new or must they themselves recognise their role before this newness can begin?

Wilson Harris —Well, that is where the community is challenged. If it brings together the diseased parts and says that is the whole of society, as many of the intellectuals are doing, then there is no hope. But if the society realises what is happening then it may become extremely important as we move into the 21st Century.

These societies could become a storehouse of creative conscience. For example, in *Carnival* you may remember the man who had a donkey-cart called "Orion Chariot". In my boyhood I used to see buses running

on the East Coast of Demerara with all these names—names which had to do with Constellations, with Emperors and others, but why should a man call his donkey-cart “Orion Chariot”?

We discovered not long before that, in Carnival, that something happened to a man as he was looking into a creek with a torchlight. He shone his torch into the creek and illumined the eyes of the crocodile which was below the water. At nights if you shine your torch into the creek the eyes of the crocodile glow like stars, like coal. Not in the day, only at night.

That is how we knew when crocodiles were lurking in the creeks. I used that image to suggest that the denizens of the inferno were pulling their weaponry, their cannon, along. The eyes of the crocodile also may relate to a constellation within the folk imagination.

Therefore, the constellation has roots in the eyes of the crocodile and it appears that this is a wounded apparition in the novel because earlier the young boy who was playing on the beach was playing “crab-nebula” and he had suffered a wound.

Once again vulnerable humanity, wounded humanity, within the masks of Carnival, becomes imaginatively capable of grasping what is happening to it, that it not only transfers its wounded selfhood into the heavens, but in doing so it suddenly becomes aware that all the creatures around it are vulnerable, even the terrifying crocodile is vulnerable because once you put that light on its eyes then you could aim a gun there if you wanted to kill the creature.

But the point I wish to make is that these societies are plagued with violence. You can see it right through, from Haiti through the West Indies, into this area and further in South America. How are we going to repair that violence unless we have a very deep-seated concept of self-judgement? Self-judgement comes partly from the excavating of biases.

It also comes from finding new density to formidable themes—the great Orion Constellation—you know Orion has the sword, but if you look closely at Orion you will see one wrist is severed. Orion has suffered a wound and therefore Orion relates to inner as much as outer space, to a wounded yet implicitly transfigured humanity in the margins of space.

I return to what I said before, History is not pure. You would think that the burden of such enquiry would fall upon Europe. After all, Europe has the equipment, and the institutions. But it is not falling on Europe because Europe is prosperous. And prosperity shackles people. Understandably it makes them less inclined to take risks. I know this is a complex irony, an irony rooted in materialism. Prosperity should liberate. Except when it becomes an absolute kind of materialism. In other words freedom of ideological choice is becoming inhibited. But we who live here (in the marginal societies) are so challenged that we must be involved in this kind of enquiry. It is an unfair burden. But that is the

burden which history has placed on this community. Either this community will become nihilistic, it will group together all its diseased parts and say the whole society is diseased, or it will start to read these different levels I bring in my novels. It seems to me that the fiction I write is deeply rooted in the psyche of the marginal man and woman. Paradoxically such fiction possesses universality for that reason.

It does not possess universality because of some sophisticated comedy of manners narrative which you can compare to Jane Austen's works, where people reflect on refinements of behaviour—who is good and who is bad; and who is the hero. I do not, however, dispute that this type of fiction has its value and importance.

But many black writers, who do not like to admit it, write comedy of manners. Their fiction is protest, protest all the time. But when you protest against something and that is all you do, you are conditioned by the thing you protest against. You have to find a different way of charging the thing you protest against with a different density and different roots. Then you begin to create questions which cause the premises on which that thing stands to yield a capacity for revision.

Rovin Deodat—What seems to be coming out here is that, if you take a writer like V.S. Naipaul, there you have someone with a very nihilistic view of the Caribbean, and lately of the entire world. It seems to me that you are at one end and someone like Naipaul is at the very opposite end. Naipaul seems to provide a very good demonstration of your thesis of bringing together the diseased parts and labelling it the whole—hence reflecting a diseased world, a diseased Guyana and the Caribbean.

Wilson Harris—I have to leave that kind of comment to you.

Rovin Deodat—Is this the first time, from your point of view, that a civilisation has had to look at the question of marginality as we have to, or has this happened when Europe was unsettled before it moved into its current prosperity, or the Romans or Greeks?

Wilson Harris—The Roman and Greek worlds were overturned by marginal figures—the early Christians, who were they?—at the very fringes of the civilised world. But they were to raise questions that were to stagger the civilised world. Those questions were not raised by great philosophers. They were not raised by the men who were at the centre of the court. They were raised by marginal figures.

Marginality has not been properly explored. Marginality means that you relate to a civilisation at a level where the civilisation has to question itself and revise its premises, and that brings about an element of profound self-judgement.

The violence we experience in this part of the world is not simply

violence which comes out of the Imperial world. We are continuously blaming the Imperial world—this is not to say that the Imperial world has not left legacies here which we have to deal with—but at a certain level we have the authority, not the authoritarianism, the authority to understand that our freedom is an immensely precious and valuable asset and that freedom speaks eloquently to the world, because then you are saying that the human person cannot be discarded, the human person is not irrelevant. This is something we have to understand ourselves. So we have to look at these forms which we have tended to accept without appreciating the fact they need to be profoundly revised in the way I am suggesting.

Rovin Deodat —In this exploration you have used memory and the Jungian theory of the collective unconscious. How does that work for you?

Wilson Harris —Why I tend to think that the Jungian theory of the unconscious does work is that over the years I have proven it for myself. I revised my work ... but I can't go into it in detail. Let me just say that behind this book *Carnival*, 172 pages, lies about 700 - 800 pages of draft.

As one revises, one discovers clues in the work which seem to be planted there by someone else. I call them intuitive clues. So they come out of the unconscious and you revise through those. Now as you revise through those clues, you are throwing light backwards and forwards. Very often you have to discard areas of your manuscript which seem precious and nice. They have to go because of a kind of inner command. Then the momentum comes. You might write 300 pages before the key turns in the lock. Then these clues begin to come together. And a momentum is born which drives the work, in which the work seems to "write" itself.

Rovin Deodat —I am glad you said that because I always thought that you deliberately set out to write short novels. Most of your books are no more than 200 pages, but behind that as you have said is an enormous amount of work.

Wilson Harris —That is true. If I had retained all the original draft of *Carnival* it would have been a much longer novel but a betrayal of the work.

The drawing on the facing page, done in pen and ink by Stanley Greaves in the 1960's, was made in response to this poem of Wordsworth McAndrew:

LEGEND OF THE CARRION CROW

They call you Carrion Crow
scorn to eat your flesh
spit when they see you administering the last rites
call you Cathartes, the Clean-up,
yet if they only knew
the secret of your strange religion.

Once you were the silver bird of the heavens
once you flew as high and as free
as only a bird can. The sky was yours
for you were king of the air
but here
was the secret of your discontent:
it was not enough to just live and die,
not knowing. You kept asking, whence came I?
whither go I, and why? The sky
must hold the answer, you thought,
and sought long and desperately
to glimpse what lay beyond it.
Relentlessly you fought
pitted bone and tendon
against the blue barrier that mocked you, locked you off
from the secret world behind its curvature.
But you were more determined than it knew
and could fly higher.
So you perspired at your quest
until, one inspired day, you flew
so hard and so fast against the blue
closing your wings at the last
minute for penetration
that at last you had a look at the other side.

Nobody knows what you saw
when you passed through
but you burned in that sacred blue fire
and returned, black as coals, dumb,
numb from the experience
to become this mendicant preacher
minister to those souls who die without sacrament
trading blessings for food
a saved soul for a full belly.

And now when I see you
crowding a carcass for the unction
or nailed against the sky like a crucifix
with the two spots of tarnished silver
beneath your wings where you'd closed them
I long to have you say a De Profundis for me,
when I die, and I wonder:
Was yours a punishment or a purification?



STANLEY CREATES

Derek Walcott, *The Arkansas Testament*,
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 112 pages.

Review by Anthony Kellman

Webster's New World Dictionary describes a testimony as "any affirmation or declaration". The Old and New Testaments in the Bible are considered affirmative covenants between god and man established through the mediation of prophets. A will is also a testament, a declarative "last will and testament". This preamble of definitions is not merely the ramblings of an undisciplined reviewer, but is motivated by issues raised in *The Arkansas Testament* (Derek Walcott's latest book of poetry), and is an attempt to find an adequate context for the discussion of the poems.

Divided into two parts—"Here" and Elsewhere"—the poems contain subjective/objective declarations concerning the poet's place in his homeland, the Caribbean, and other northern places where he often sojourns. Walcott's two testaments are both Old and New, underlining the book's structural parallel with the Bible. "Here" can be seen as an Old Testament—the poet's origins and past life in the Caribbean; while "Elsewhere"—a New Testament—articulates his current experiences in the United States where he works.

What links the two geographically disparate parts of the book is the poet's sense of personal invisibility, and his disappointment, even at times despair, at the human condition. Walcott's is a continuing quest to integrate two selves fashioned by his African and European ancestries. Because he is neither and always "Here" and "Elsewhere", Walcott, time and time again, finds himself an outsider, an Everyman figure, "schizophrenic, wrenched by two styles" ("Codicil", *The Castaway*, 1965).

From his sense of historical alienation in *The Castaway* and *The Star Apple Kingdom* (1979); through *The Fortunate Traveller* (1981), who is fortunate only in the sense that he is in a position to escape places when they become unbearable, but who is hounded by guilt complexes; through his penultimate collection *Midsummer* (1984) where in "Gauguin" he concedes his regret that "I left [The Caribbean] too late", Walcott in *The Arkansas Testament* still seems to be wrestling with his Janus double-sided vision and uses this schizophrenic reality of Caribbean Man to testify to the failures of regional Independences to sustain artists there. In a bid to find his place/the poet's place in a world of arrogance, pride, upside-down-values and racism, Walcott presents a personal Testament which is universal in its implications, and which challenges the reader to be more open in terms of relationships, racial and otherwise.

As recently characteristic in the openings of his books, Walcott

returns to the Caribbean in the poem "The Lighthouse", to his island home St. Lucia where "Stars pierce their identical spots/over Castries..." Nothing, apparently, has changed. The domino-slamming men in the rum shops share the same ribald jokes, while "Unaging moonlight falls/ on the graves". The tightly-structured metre of this long poem suggests the tenseness and apprehension the poet feels on returning home. The imagery of the poem also reflects his psychological precariousness. The full moon is described as "A coin tossed once overhead,/that stuck there, not heads or tails".

The personas in this poem, very reminiscent of V.S. Naipaul's hopeless characters, are the dispossessed, men who have become victims of historical legacies of attrition and post-Independence victimisation. There are drunks; an actor "lost in the post office! Stripped/A superfluous character written out of script"; children running down crooked streets, some falling, most taking "the straight/road from their galvanized hell".

In "The Three Musicians", a parody of the tale of the Biblical wise men, three down-and-out musicians go house to house on Christmas day serenading neighbours for food and drink. These men who "eat in silence...belt out two straights,/ then start singing like shite..." are pitied by the master of the house who "feels/that this heart will burst" at the sight of these three "kings".

Another character, the persona in "A Letter From The Old Guard" who has served with Lord Alexander in the Sudan, is reduced to an arthritic night watchman. It is Remembrance Day, and the elderly man reflects proudly on his days in the colonial army. Today, he has very little to show for his heroic exploits and attributes his fate to the failures of the new Independences. He states with some bitterness: "Then we get Independence all of a sudden/and something went. We can't run anything/... we black people".

The dots of stars that mottle the sky in "The Lighthouse", suggesting ellipsis or incompleteness, is the point where the poet resumes his exploration of his island/history/self with each return. The fact that Walcott consistently makes this effort at coming to terms with his heritage is a hope in itself.

Not only does Walcott have a stubborn love for his homeland, but he is extremely courageous in his quest for stability and wholeness considering that his responses to the region are often tinged—sometimes laced—with terror and dread. In "Cul De Sac Valley", he notes that "the forest runs/sleeping, its eyes shut", and that "Pigeon Island/pins the sea in its claws". This disturbing imagery underlines the poet's fear of Caribbean leaders bounding into the twenty-first century through the dark—the blind leading the blind (?)—and is articulated, I think, out of a sense of responsibility and concern for his homeland.

In "Gros Islet", the poet's bitterness (or perhaps it is more disap-

pointment) reaches new intensity and outspokenness. Here, "There is no wine..., no cheese, the almonds are green,/ the grapes bitter, the language is that of slaves". And in "White Magic", white myths are praised for their authenticity, whereas the local ones are denounced as being unoriginal, based on ignorance. Walcott writes:

...the deer-footed, hobbling hunter, Papa Bois,
he's just Pan's clone, one more translated satyr

.....

Our myths are ignorance, theirs is literature.

The last poem in Part 1 of the book, "The Light of the World", highlights Walcott's guilt feelings for having "left" the Caribbean. He says: "I had abandoned them,...left them to sing Marley's songs of sadness...". Yet, he loves his people's warm neighbourliness, and feels as though he "might suddenly start sobbing on the public transport" in which he is travelling. He thinks that he has abandoned them and also that they have abandoned him. He feels that he should have given them something more tangible, but all that he can give them is "This thing I have called "The Light of the World". Earlier in the poem, he refers to a female muse as the Light of the World, so that it seems as though Walcott is implying that what he will give his people (and perhaps this is the best possible gift that he can truly give) is his poems, his art.

There are some beautiful poems in Part 2 of this collection as well. This section's title poem "Elsewhere" takes a look at the effects of war. It is really a parody of a pastoral. Children waddle in streams, there are nearby old men, women squatting by a river, and "a stick (stirring) up a twinkling of butterflies". Above this scene, in contrast, "flies circle their fathers". "Salsa" is a satirical comment on the New York-izing and Miami-izing of San Juan; "The Young Wife", an elegy written to a man whose wife has died of cancer; "For Adrian", a fresh poem about an old subject—departures. All these poems are tightly structured, using Walcott's innovative ballad metre.

While there are these fine poems in this part of the book, the section, overall, is not as assured as Part 1. Too often, it seems as though Walcott has not fully assimilated the nuances of the northern cultures which he writes about. Although always skillfully crafted, several of the poems here are half-glimpsed clichéd sketches. In this section, one gets a sense of travelogue writing, mere reportage, particularly in the disappointing title poem, *The Arkansas Testament*.

This thirteen-page poem decries the poet's sojourn in Arkansas, a racially segregated state. He feels himself "homesick/for islands with fringed shores", and although very acute in his observations of the physical surroundings of the place, he lacks an authoritative tone.

The main point of this long poem, though, and one which makes the link between the two sections, is that "I was still nothing". The poet

is exiled both "Here" and "Elsewhere". In the Caribbean, he is alienated as an artist; in Arkansas, because he is a black man. Once, in a cafeteria "I looked for my own area", he writes. "The muttering black decanter/had all I needed; it could sigh for /Sherman's smoking march to Atlanta/or the march to Montgomery". The sunshine in Arkansas is cold. Fearing rejection, the poet asks: "Will I be a citizen/or an afterthought of the state?"

It is the fear of regional rejection which drove Caribbean writers to the Metropolis in the 1950s and 60s, and which is still driving New Generation writers to the U.S.A. and Canada—those who can leave. It is this sense of rejection at home which is at the heart of Derek Walcott's disappointment in the Caribbean. When Bruce King in his introduction to *World Literature in English* (Chelsea Associates, New York, 1987)—a new anthology of Third World poetry and fiction featuring such West Indian writers as Edward Brathwaite, Andrew Salkey, Tom Clarke and this writer—says that unlike Walcott, New Generation writers in the Caribbean no longer have to self-publish, I wonder which Caribbean Mr. King is talking about. Scores of younger writers—certainly in St. Lucia, St. Kitts, Grenada, St. Vincent, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago—are still forced to publish their own chapbooks because of the lack of outlets. Have things in this area really changed so drastically since Walcott's day? In a sense, *The Arkansas Testament* suggests that things have gotten worse.

The hope in *The Arkansas Testament* is that while the wandering poet may be nothing, by that very nothingness he has the potential to contain and be everything. The book is also a testament to the need of people - whether Caribbean or North American—to be less parochial and provincial in their outlooks on life. As Walcott states in "Tomorrow, Tomorrow":

To have loved one horizon is insularity;
it blindfolds vision, it narrows experience.

A Shapely Fire. Changing the Literary Landscape.
Edited by Cyril Dabydeen. Oakville, Cedar Press, 1987.

A Review by Alim Hosein

The increased migration of people for various reasons this past century has had a number of implications, not the least of which, to the student of Literature, are the implications for the Literature that such people produce in their new countries. In some countries, for example the United States of America, the existing Literature has been considerably added to by people who are migrants or whose parents were migrants. But sizeable proportions of such Literatures have received distinction as Literatures in their own right. Hence, we have such additions to the Literary dictionary as "Black American" and "Jewish American" Literatures. But some people still ask the question: "Why isn't 'Black American' Literature simply called 'Black' Literature, or why isn't 'Jewish American' Literature referred to as 'Jewish' Literature, or why aren't both simply called 'American' Literature? The question, perhaps has some force. The tendency to create such hybrid names may be abused by persons who are partial to labels. Such labels, too, may mean nothing even to the writer who is so described. On the other hand, they may be valid descriptions of new currents in Literature.

A recently-published collection of short stories, a play and poems provides fuel for such consideration. Entitled **A Shapely Fire. Changing the Literary Landscape**, this collection not only pulls together some writing done by West Indians living and writing in Canada, but it also proposes that such writing constitutes a new category in Literature: Caribbean Canadian Literature. The editor, Guyanese Cyril Dabydeen, submits that a Caribbean Canadian Literature is in evolution in a quiet manner ("in the closet") but he also points to the fact that a growing number of Caribbean emigre writers are appearing in regular journals and magazines.

The subtitle, **Changing the Literary Landscape**, makes such a strong claim that it must be the essential thing to consider. The only definition of this Literature that Dabydeen offers is that it is a "significant manifestation" of a "vitality in prose and poetry by Caribbean writers who have made their home in Canada... continually shaping and being shaped by the spirit of place". Moreover, in his Introduction, he suggests a clear distinction between Caribbean Literature or even Caribbean writing in exile, and Caribbean Canadian Literature when he relates the essential effect of the Literature he proposes to the strengthening of Canadian nationhood:

In this context, a real shaping is constantly taking place;
the collective Canadian spirit is enhanced and enriched

by the varied cultural streams and in the fusion of old and new traditions towards a vital celebration of the oneness of the evolving Canadian consciousness.

Indeed, there are pieces in this collection which elaborate instances of intersection of Caribbean and Canadian values, or in which the Caribbean mind brings together Caribbean and Canadian images as it muses in the Canadian context. Daniel Caudeiron's "Day Shift/Night Shift":

At Queen and Spadina
the traffic thunders on, squeezing left
for road repairs, Babylon and Babel converge,
near misses, kissing fenders aqui se habla espanol.
fala Portugues,
Chinese varieties, Jamaican groceries ...

and "Caribana"

Toronto moving
Southbound
Colours
bodies ...

Karl Gordon's "Strangers at a Glance"

But tomorrow
It will be spring
And tomorrow
Life begins anew
In its hopeful struggle
To find the promised warmth
This strange new clime.

and Dabydeen's

Across the ocean, Atlantic's swell
And billow. I taste cod
In Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad
and Demerara—more trade. In Newfoundland
Later, I lie drunkenly—

... all explore the dialectics of context, the areas of possibility for authenticity through the connection of Caribbean spirit and Canadian landscape.

The stories continue the theme. Together, they map the various

ways in which the West Indian responds to the nuances of his new physical and spiritual context. Thus, sometimes we see him caught between Canada and the Caribbean (like Sylvie is, in Dabydeen's "Ain't Got no Cash"); as a total outsider without hope of achieving accommodation (like Marie-Ann in Gerard Etienne's "Deaf Woman") or as a potent, if quiet, catalyst (like the Jamaican in Austin Clarke's "Give it a Shot")

But while these examples signal some of the new directions which West Indian writers are taking, whether this constitutes even the beginning of a new branch in Literature is still questionable. Is this a new Literature or is it part of the natural development of Caribbean Literature? The inclusion of the play, Roderick Walcott's "Cul de Sac", some of the stories: Samuel Selvon's "Zeppy's Machine", Madeline Coopsammy's "The Tick Tick Bicycle", Neil Bissoondath's "Insecurity" and some of the poems such as Lilian Allen's "Belly Woman's Lament" and "Marriage", Dionne Brand's "P.P.S. Grenada" to name a few, which are all retrievals and evaluations bearing on Caribbean life, does not help the case either. Dabydeen includes these as examples of what he calls the "there" aspect of Caribbean Canadian Literature, the experience of

the immediacy of beginnings in what has been called the **there**, the place where one came from, seen in terms of the palpable residues of the spirit manifested in powerful feelings, often of nostalgia, or seeking an enduring identity ...

But this is not very useful. It is difficult to see how such pieces may be called Canadian in any sense. Much literature about the Caribbean has been written outside the Caribbean—for example, in Britain—without claims being made for, for example, a "Caribbean British" Literature. Does the fact that a story or play or poem was written by a West Indian living in Canada create a new Literature? Does the location in which a story was written override the importance of the location about which it is vitally concerned? Or should the claim for such a Literature be based on the proposition that an exceptional imaginative process is happening, resulting in the creation of a unique Literature? In relation to the particular type of Literature being proposed in this collection, should the reader not expect it to be perceivably different from both Canadian Literature and Caribbean Literature even though it may be powerfully informed by both these traditions?

Yet, *A Shapely Fire*, including Guyanese, Trinidadian, Barbadian, St. Lucian, Haitian and Jamaican writers, does justify itself by giving notice of the many not-so-well-known Caribbean writers working in Canada, and by showing that these writers handle their material with self-assurance and skill.

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