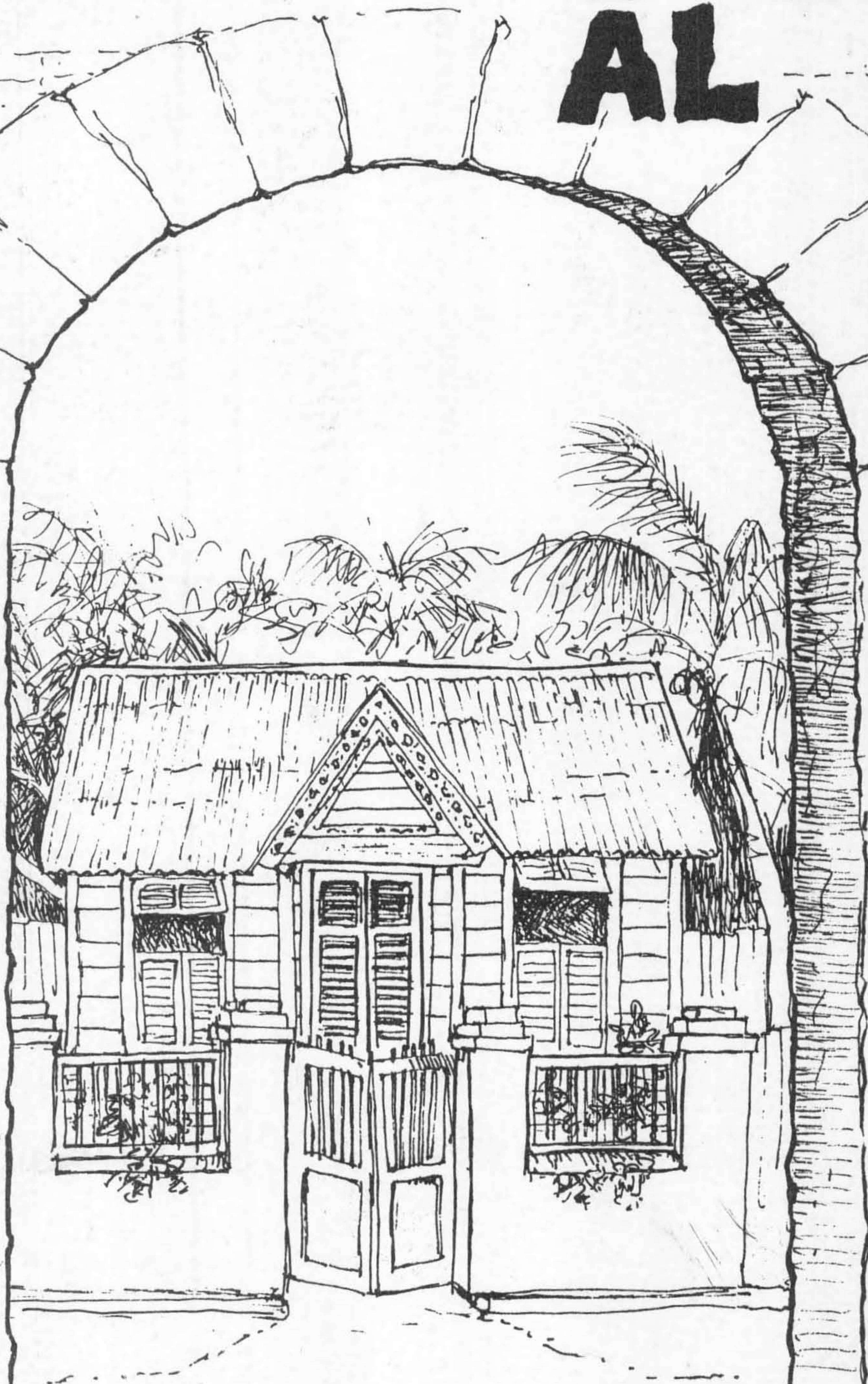


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June 1990

KYK 41(Joint Issue with BIM)— Edited by Ian McDonald

June 1990

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Across the Editors' Desk		3
1989 Guyana Prize Address	Rex Nettleford	18
Poetry		
Mother Jackson Murders the Moon	Gloria Escoffery	27
chant two	Arnold Itwaru	28
Tension Rain	Vibart Ian Duncan	28
god and the cat; Tasting Sugarcake	Mahadai Das	29
Walking at 4 a.m.	Ralph Thompson	30
History Lesson	Ian McDonald	32
The Misses Norman	Cecil Gray	33
A Prophet in His Time	Sasenarine Persaud	34
Hungry Children's Song	Desrey Fox	36
Parish Registers	John Gilmore	36
Waterfalls	Anthony Kellman	37
mrs maniver	Marc Matthews	38
Pegasus	Brian Chan	40
Two Drawings by Stanley Greaves		26, 41
Fiction		
New York Nineteen Eighty nine	McDonald Dash	42
Pork Eater	Rooplall Monar	44
Article		
The Poetry of Frank Collymore	A.J. Seymour	55
Reviews		
Shanti by Arnold Itwaru	Stephanos Stephanides	64
Between the Dash and the Comma and Demerary Telepathy by Sasenarine Persaud	Karen Swenson	68
In Memoriam — AJS		71
Wilson Harris; Eusi Kwayana; Ian McDonald; Sr Mary Noel Menezes; Cleveland Hamilton; Robert and Alyma Moore; Stewart Brown.		

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A great many individuals and organisations have contributed to the success of **Kyk-Over-Al** since it was relaunched in December 1984. We owe a very special debt of appreciation to the following for their support of issue No. 41. Their vigorous assistance, so readily offered, in strengthening an important part of the cultural tradition of Guyana and the West Indies deserves the thanks of the whole community.

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ACROSS THE EDITOR'S DESK

There at the Creation

A joint issue of **Kyk-Over-Al** and **BIM** has never before been published and is therefore something of a landmark in West Indian literary history. **Kyk-Over-Al**, founded by A.J. Seymour in 1945, and **BIM**, founded by Frank Collymore in 1942, were crucial in making clear the importance of literature and culture in the life of the emerging region. **Kyk** and **BIM** provided outlets for, and encouragement to, young Caribbean writers. They emphasised that there was a West Indian dimension to cultural life throughout the region. Together Seymour and Collymore, with their two flagships, were a two-man cultural task force at a vital and formative stage of our history. Colonial countries were getting ready to be independent nations and fresh and freedom-focussed themes were being substituted for themes which were routine and subserviently second-hand. In that time **Kyk** and **Bim** were of enormous importance in giving a cultural lead, in fashioning a new way of looking at ourselves and being proud. As time went on, and talent flourished, and new literary heroes emerged, no doubt their role became less seminally important and even, in some eyes, no longer very relevant. But let us never forget that they were there at the creation—Seymour and Collymore, **Kyk-Over-Al** and **Bim**.

AJS—In Memoriam

It is unutterably sad that AJS died before this joint issue, which he had so much looked forward to seeing, could be published. We mourn AJS profoundly. He was a lovely poet and many of his poems will never be forgotten in the West Indies. He loved his God with a love that passeth most men's understanding and this made him an immensely gentle, strong, good and peaceful man. I never heard him say an even half-cruel word. He was passionate in the good things—in his love of family, love of books, love of poetry, love of his native land.

Three days before he died, on Christmas Day, 1989, **Kyk** 40 was put in AJS's hands. It stayed there on the bedside table with his Bible. Before he died he requested that we do all in our power to continue the magazine, this child of his heart, spark of his spirit, and we will try to carry out what was as near a command as AJS ever came near to issuing. But we know as we continue that he can never be replaced as Editor and guiding spirit. Every proof-read line will remind us of him.

AJS had promised to write a Foreword for this joint **Kyk-Bim** issue and he told me he had started to make some notes for it and, in particular, to jot down some memories of Frank Collymore. Sadly, these notes have not come to light.

However, AJS had also mentioned as a possibility that his 1981 article on the Poetry of Frank Collymore might be used in the joint issue and the inclusion of that article has seemed to us entirely appropriate.

The Mainstream

In a vast new biography of William Faulkner by Frederick Karl I came across something Faulkner said that stuck in my mind:

I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it.

Those who live and write in lands which are remote from metropolitan literary power bases, and let that depress them, might remember those words. In literature nowhere is a backwater, everywhere is mainstream.

The Act of Writing

A correspondent has sent me the following extract from an article by V.S. Naipaul in *The Listener* of 23rd May, 1968:

...the actual words, the neatness that comes out in the words, is arrived at after a lot of hard work. Writing is also a discovery and the discovery occurs at the moment of writing.... The incubation actually occurs subconsciously in the first year of doing nothing, of playing, of writing rubbish, writing 20,000 words and then throwing them away as I did for my last novel (*The Mimic Men*). I think there are few people who feel so worthless and so useless as the novelist who'll spend weeks, several months, trying to write something and nothing is happening. I really go down sometimes feeling that I don't deserve my meals, you know. The terrible thing is that one day I know that I'll spend a couple of years and there'll be nothing at the end to show. But that's the sick period. The actual writing, when it's going well, when you know what you are doing, that is very good, that is very nice.

How Poetry Is Achieved

In the last chapter of Seamus Heaney's *The Government of the Tongue* (Faber and Faber, 1988) there is a long and fascinating analysis of what Heaney calls the three degrees of poetic achievement. He reads a famous passage of Wordsworth as a parable of these three poetic steps.

The passage in question is the one where Wordsworth writes about his young self whistling through his fingers to arouse the owls so that they would then call back to him; but it especially evokes certain moments when he would be imposed upon by the power of the whole natural universe:

There was a Boy; ye knew him well, ye cliffs
And islands of Winander!—many a time,
At evening, when the earliest stars began
To move along the edges of the hills,
Rising or setting, would he stand alone
Beneath the trees, or by the glimmering lake;
And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
Pressed closely palm to palm and to his mouth
Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
That they might answer him.—And they would shout
Across the watery vale, and shout again,
Responsive to his call,—with quivering peals,
And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud
Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild,
Of jocund din! And, when there came a pause
Of silence such as baffled his best skill:
Then, sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

The first task of the poet is to learn how to entwine his or her hands so that the whistle comes out right. This may seem a minimal achievement, yet those of you who have a memory of attempting to get it right will also remember the satisfaction and justification implicit in that primary sounding forth of one's presence. People who learned to whistle on their thumbs, to trumpet and tu-whit, tu-whoop in the back seats of classrooms and the back seats of buses, would then be happy to perform this feat for its own sake, repetitively, self-forgetfully and tirelessly. It was an original act of making, the equivalent in the oral/aural sphere of mud-pies in the tactile/plastic sphere and, as has been well observed, one of the chief pleasures of life is when I show you the mud-pies I have made and you show me the mud-pies you have made. In this trope, the little magazine can be understood as an echo of owl whistles or a gallery of mud-pie life, and many a poetic career begins and ends with poems which do no more than cry out in innocent primary glee, 'Listen, I can do it! Look how well it turned out! And I can do it again! See?'

Heaney goes on to consider the second level of poetic attainment which is implicit in Wordsworth's narrative:

When the vale fills with the actual cries of owls responding to the boy's art, we have an image of the classically empowered poet, the one who has got beyond scale-practising, the one who, as Wordsworth says in his Preface, rejoices in the spirit of life that is in him and is delighted to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe. This represents the poetry of relation, of ripple-and-wave effect upon audience; at this point, the poet's art has found ways by which distinctively personal subjects and emotional necessities can be made a common possession of the reader's. This, at its most prim, is a matter of the old 'what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed' kind of thing. At its most enriching, it operates by virtue of skeins of language coming together as a dream-web which nets psyche to psyche in order to effect what Frost called 'a clarification', 'a momentary stay against confusion'.

Finally, Heaney examines the third kind of poetry suggested by Wordsworth's passage:

The third kind of poetry I find suggested there is that in which the poem's absolute business is an unconceding pursuit of poetic insight and poetic knowledge. We have passed the first stage where poetic making was itself an end and an anxiety; and we have come through the second stage of social relation and emotional persuasion, where the owl-cry of the poems stimulates the answering owl-dream in the audience and 'strikes ... as a remembrance'. In terms of the Wordsworth story, we have arrived at the point where the boy cannot make any noise with his hands:

... And, when there came a pause
Of silence such as baffled his best skill:
Then, sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

Here the boy—call him the poet—has his skill mocked; skill is no use any more; but in the baulked silence there occurs

something more wonderful than owl-calls. As he stands open like an eye or an ear, he becomes imprinted with all the melodies and hieroglyphs of the world; the workings of the active universe, to use another phrase from *The Prelude*, are echoed far inside him. This part of the story, then, suggests that degree of imaginative access where we feel the poem as a gift arising or descending beyond the poet's control, where direct contact is established with the image-cellar, the dream-bank, the word-hoard, the truth-cave—whatever place a poem like Yeats' 'Long-Legged Fly' emerges from.

Heaney ends the chapter, and his serious and lovely book, by calling attention to Wordsworth's well-known formulation, in his 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, of the way poetic knowledge gets expressed.

Wordsworth's account is the finest I know of the problematic relation between artistic excellence and truth, between Ariel and Prospero, between poetry as impulse and poetry as criticism of life. The following quotation includes a perhaps over-familiar sentence, and may show some syntactical strain, but it covers a lot of the essential ground:

Not that I mean to say, that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formally conceived; but I believe that my habits of meditation have so formed my feelings, as that my description of such objects excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a purpose. If in this opinion I am mistaken, I can have little right to the name of a poet. For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: but though this is true, poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other we discover what is really important to men, so by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the

being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated.

Essentially, Wordsworth declares that what counts is the quality, intensity and breadth of the poet's concerns between the moments of writing, the gravity and purity of the mind's appetites and applications between moments of inspiration. This is what determines the ultimate human value of the act of poetry. That act remains free, self-governing, self-seeking, but the worth of the booty it brings back from its raid upon the inarticulate will depend upon the emotional capacity, intellectual resource and general civilization which the articulate poet maintains between the raids.

The Artist as Rebel

The following is an extract from a piece by H.L. Mencken in the **Baltimore Evening Sun** of April 7, 1924:

"It is almost as safe to assume that an artist of any dignity is against his country, i.e., against the environment in which God hath placed him, as it is to assume that his country is against the artist. The special quality which makes an artist of him might almost be defined, indeed, as an extraordinary capacity for irritation, a pathological sensitiveness to environmental pricks and stings. He differs from the rest of us mainly because he reacts sharply and in an uncommon manner to phenomena which leave the rest of us unmoved, or, at most, merely annoy us vaguely. He is, in brief, a more delicate fellow than we are, and hence less fitted to prosper and enjoy himself under the conditions of life which he and we must face alike. Therefore, he takes to artistic endeavor, which is at once a criticism of life and an attempt to escape from life.

So much for the theory of it. The more the facts are studied, the more they bear it out. In those fields of art at all events which concern themselves with ideas as well as with sensations it is almost impossible to find any trace of an artist who was not actively hostile to his environment, and thus an indifferent patriot. From Dante to Tolstoi and from Shakespeare to Mark Twain the story is ever the same. Names suggest themselves instantly: Goethe, Heine, Shelley, Byron, Thackeray, Balzac, Rabelais, Cervantes, Swift, Dostoevski, Carlyle, Moliere, Pope—all bitter critics of their time and nation, most of them piously hated by the contemporary 100 percenters, some of them actually fugitives from rage and reprisal.

Dante put all of the patriotic Italians of his day into Hell, and showed them boiling, roasting and writhing on hooks. Cervantes drew such a devastating

picture of the Spain that he lived in that it ruined the Spaniards. Shakespeare made his heroes foreigners and his clowns Englishmen. Goethe was in favour of Napoleon. Rabelais, a citizen of Christendom rather than of France, raised a cackle against it that Christendom is still trying in vain to suppress. Swift, having finished the Irish and then the English, proceeded to finish the whole human race. The exceptions are few and far between, and not many of them will bear examination. So far as I know, the only eminent writer in English history who was also a 100 percent Englishman, absolutely beyond suspicion, was Samuel Johnson..... But was Johnson actually an artist? If he was, then a cornet player is a musician. He employed the materials of one of the arts, to wit, words, but his use of them was hortatory, not artistic. Johnson was the first Rotarian: living today, he would be a United States Senator, or a university president. He left such wounds upon English prose that it was a century recovering from them".

The Poetry of Tennis

Of all sports cricket in particular has attracted excellent writers. Wisden is to carry an obituary of Samuel Beckett, the only Nobel Prize winner to have played first-class cricket. In **Beyond a Boundary** C.L.R. James wrote a classic not only of the game of cricket but of West Indian history and literature. As Ken Ramchand wrote at the time of C.L.R.'s death, no West Indian who has not read **Beyond the Boundary** can consider himself educated. If any book deserved, demanded, to be a textbook in the schools that book is one.

Tennis is not so commonly associated with poetry. However, in a short piece which appeared at Wimbledon time last year the **Economist** made the connection.

Although tennis-mania may seem to drive out all higher thoughts, it is not so. Tennis and poetry are natural partners. In "Henry V" the Dauphin mocks Henry's claim to French territory with a gift of tennis balls, prompting the young king's vow "to play a set shall strike his father's crown/Into the hazard". John Webster's angst-ridden "The Duchess of Malfi" depicts men as "the stars' tennis-balls struck and bandied which way they please". More cheerily, Betjeman made the sport synonymous with the carefree days of middle-class youth epitomised by the rapture of holding a "strongly adorable tennis-girl's hand!".

Certain American poets have found in tennis a parallel to the act of writing itself. In a famous dismissal of the claims of modernism, Robert Frost declared: "I'd as soon write free verse as play tennis without a net". Just as well he never played his bohemian compatriot, Ezra Pound, whose commitment to free verse may well have been reflected in his manic style ("like an

inebriated kangaroo") on court. Younger poets also combined a passion for ground strokes with a quest for metre and symbol. Theodore Roethke was a university tennis coach. Randall Jarrell took as much pride in his tournament victories as he did in his published works.

Like poetry, tennis demands a degree of discipline, concentration and imagination that engenders a kind of self-discovery. After a particularly satisfying match, Jarrell mused on the pure pleasure of doing "what one should, beyond one's expectations". In both tennis and poetry, the individual meets a challenge—an opponent on the one hand, shifting thoughts and emotions on the other—within the boundaries of a form. This is why Frost wanted the net to stay up: without the form there was no achievement. For him the poet was "a man of prowess, just like an athlete", and the aim of writing, in a word, was "scoring. You've got to score".

Such correspondences work both ways. Any tennis player soon learns that most of the game, maddeningly, is in the mind. Beyond the necessary technique there is, just as in poetry, the mysterious matter of inspiration. In the wonderful state of being "loose", when concentration and confidence are one and the game seems to play itself, the player makes shots he did not know he could, just as a poet in full flow may, as one put it, "find out things you didn't know you knew".

Certain professionals of the modern game represent definite poetic types. The Swedes, for instance, are natural bards of the North, telling long winter's tales slowly and carefully. By contrast, John McEnroe is clearly the *poete maudit*, cursed with a vision of perfection that he is fated to pursue at any cost and savaging anyone who interferes. Miroslav Mecir is the gifted eccentric, somewhat preoccupied, capable of brilliant images and unexpected turns of phrase.

Poets, however, do their performing alone, subject only later to the verdicts of line-judges. It is possible for the experience of winning to remain purely personal and satisfying in itself; and any poetic champion would be happy if one of his works received as much as a first-round loser at Wimbledon.

The Emperor's New Clothes

Over the years I have watched in astonishment as theorists of literary criticism have, first, relegated text to the status of corpse fit only for cold dissection, then dismissed authors as irrelevant or "dead", and finally, elevated criticism itself to literature's throne—seat because those pretenders, text and

author, have after all been slain. All this is not some kind of hoax. Big men are actually taking such views seriously. When some child points and in wonder notes the emperor's nakedness a hand is clapped across the offending mouth: "You cannot be expected to understand", the solemn heads shake in unison.

A gentle plea for common sense comes from Frank Kermode in his book *An Appetite for Poetry* (Collins, London, 1989). In this book he notes that the profession of literary critic has been reduced to farce. There are now more critics alive than there have previously been in the world of history and the great majority of them seem positively to loathe literature. In America the mighty Modern Languages Association is currently dominated by ideologists who deny the possibility of literature; as many as 10,000 academic critics turn up at its conferences. "It is very peculiar", Kermode muses. "It is a subject in which many of them don't believe. In any case, I don't believe there are 10,000 talented people teaching literature who actually have any feeling for literature".

When Kermode began as a professional critic, F.R. Leavis and the New Critics were competing with a less organized group who believed in historical context. Life was simple. Then, in the Sixties, the industry exploded. Structuralism was followed by post-structuralism and deconstruction, which in turn spawned further bizarre elaborations. "It is always easier," Kermode points out, "to learn a method than to read a poem".

It is now commonplace for books of literary criticism to discuss only other critics and their ideologies. Questioned on this by a doubting public, their authors respond that criticism is the literature of our time.

The new ideologies are rapidly taking over the academies everywhere and are distancing literary studies ever further from the act of reading for pleasure. To the ideologists the idea that some texts are literature and others are not is simply bourgeois conditioning, an imposition upon students which represents a kind of colonialism.

Kermode summarizes the conflict by his own reaction on first reading Philip Larkin's "Unfinished Poem": "I was totally persuaded that I had read a great poem that I had not previously known. There are experiences like that when you know something is happening because of something in the poem, and not because of something in yourself. The theorists' answer to that is that you are no more than a crossing point of all kinds of class prejudice and this poem happens to comply with these. If you read it to an uneducated black woman in Mississippi she wouldn't think it was a great poem. The only reason I did is because of the institutional rigidity behind me. That argument has to be overthrown if anything recognizable as literature is to survive".

The force that could achieve that overthrow is fairly obvious. It is, very simply, contained in Hector's words in *Troilus and Cressida*: "Tis mad idolatry to make the service greater than the god". The new ideologists so clearly place the service above the God. By reinstating some idea of value—the privacy and the pleasure of the book—literature can perhaps be saved from the day-as-dust, unutterably boring theorists of the grimly contending abstract modern schools.

Shana Yordan

We are sad to note the death of Shana Yordan in New York at the distressingly young age of 46. She was one of the best of the younger generation of Guyanese poets coming after Martin Carter. She wrote lovely poems, collected in her book *This Listening of Eyes* (1976). The following tribute of Dr. Joyce Jonas, lecturer in English at the University of Guyana, first appeared in the *Chronicle* newspaper of November 12th, 1989.

"A long time ago I had stood on the edges of the wind and listened to the silence in the heart of a stone. In that violent quiet my other self was born." Shana Yordan.

I can see you now, Shana, your fingers busy kneading the dough, as you teach me to make roti! Your face is alive with shared thoughts that leave me puffing behind as you leap daringly from one mind-stretching idea to the next. I never did learn the art of making roti, but you taught me many other things that afternoon—about friendship and faith, yes, and about poetry.

Then, years later, there you were in that cramped apartment in Queen's. I tried hard not to register shock at the way your brown plumpness had shrunk and shrivelled to wrinkled black. "It's the medication", you shrugged. And there was your frustration—your tangible frustration at the loss of vision that kept you from your beloved books. Yet still your thoughts were "leaping the mountains, bounding the hills", and your love for life, for beauty, for God—even for me—pouring forth, defying the pain. Yes, and always despite the illness, your wonderful voice—that rich, warm cushion of sound holding the heart in its luxuriant caress.

"Shana died", they told me. "Since last Thursday".

The words seared across my Friday morning: Friday mourning. Later I took out your poetry, since that and a few scattered memories are all that remain to us.

I suppose they will still use your "Earth is Brown" in schools, and generations will listen in as you converse with your dhoti-clad grandfather. They'll share your passionate invocation of "the smell of cow-dung at foreday morning...the security of mud between...toes...the sensual pouring of paddy...through fingers". They'll trace with you the old man's fervent faith, and his grief over sons with their "city faces...purchasing identity in Tiger Bay", "Seeking a tomorrow in today's unreality". Guided by you they'll hear "bamboos to Hannuman" singing like a "sitar in the wind".

For your grandfather's generation knew its grief. So, too, did yours. In those "desperate days", those "scarecrow days" of scarcities, you wrote angrily of the "continuum of despair", of "docile queues" at shops, and of a mother's tired feet. "Oh there are motions enough", you wrote. "Late sittings of Parliament, / Commissions, Trade Teams. / Yesterday's papers that only age the world, / and numerous hullabaloo at the Park. / Yet the days guard nothing". Brickdam "afire with flamboyant frangipani", you saw as a mocking backdrop to the woeful picture of our suffering and privation.

For yours was a world of flowers, not politics; you sought answers in God, not in ideologies. Flowers fill your poetry, Shana: flowers and love. Tell me, who is the one you speak to? Is he man—or God? "So this is love", you write. "This listening of eyes, this waiting of hands / For what is beyond seeing or touching". Surely earthly lover merges with Heavenly Bridegroom here:

Your name is the curve in the hollow of my mouth
Your sigh is a choir in harmony
Your eyes are the light from behind a grey sky
Filtering through aeons to rest upon me.

How fiercely you guarded the inner self, that separateness of your person: "Tread softly through the garden of my life", you warn. "Touch not nor break the buds that fragrance lend / But graft them to that other self of mine / Which is you".

Yes, Shana, you loved. You cared for people and life and beauty and God. When they gave you a paltry three months more to live, you defiantly held tight the thin thread of hope. For three precarious years you shut ears and eyes to the monstrous shape crouched in the corner of your life and told us that "The just shall LIVE by faith". Yet despite your awesome faith, even you had to "come to terms with that violent metamorphosis called death".

Was it so violent after all? I think not, you know. I suspect, Shana, that your "listening eyes" eagerly caught the first footfalls of your Lover, and that on the November day when the sky grew strangely grey for us, it was filled with radiant light for you. And, for you, the frangipani bloomed again.

Guyanese poet Shana Yordan was born in Mahaicony on April 10, 1943, and died on November 2, 1989 after a prolonged struggle with cancer. She was buried in the U.S.A. on November 6. Educated at St John the Baptist School in Bartica, St Ambrose School and St Joseph's

High School in Georgetown, Shana began writing poetry in the late '60's. Her single volume of poetry, This Listening of Eyes, was published in 1976. Shana worked with the Guyana Broadcasting Corporation during the late '70's and also attended the University of Guyana. Her literary and academic careers were cut short by her illness, but her radiant spirit remained unfettered to the end.

Necessary Reading

It is absolutely necessary for anyone interested in West Indian literature to get and read the following books and journals.

Voiceprint (edited by Gordon Rohlehr, Mervyn Morris and Stewart Brown, Longman, 1989)

This joins the **Penguin Anthology of Caribbean Verse in English** (edited by Paula Burnett, London, 1986) as one of the essential compilations of West Indian poetry. It also has a full and fascinating Introduction by Gordon Rohlehr which alone makes the book worth its weight in whatever gold the publishers are asking for it. Not only should this be an essential written and oral text for West Indian schools but it should be on the shelves of anyone interested in West Indian writing.

The Peepal Tree Press. This astonishing little press in Yorkshire, run by Jeremy Poynting, keeps publishing poetry and fiction of immense interest and in beautiful format. Titles published by PTP so far include:

Koker (poems), **Backdam People** (collection of short stories) and, published in conjunction with Demerara Publishers, **Janjhat** (first novel) by Rooplall Monar, a new and exciting figure in writing from the region.

Timepiece (first novel) and **The Last English Plantation** (novel) by Janice Shinebourne.

Islands Lovelier than a Vision (poems) by Cyril Dabydeen.

The Crucifixion (novel) by Ismith Khan.

El Dorado West One (collection of one act plays) by Sam Selvon.

Shanti (novel) by Arnold Itwaru.

Thief With Leaf (poems) by Brian Chan.

Years of Fighting Exile (poems) by Milton Williams.

Web of October—Rereading Martin Carter by Rupert Roopnaraine.

Bones (poems) by Mahadai Das.

Dear Death (first novel) and **Demerary Telepathy** (poems) by Sasenarine Persaud, another Indo-Caribbean writer likely to emerge as a leading regional author on the 1990s.

Crown Point and Other Poems by Velma Pollard.

Among future publications PTP will be bringing out the **Collected Poems** of E.M. Roach. Eric Roach is one of the most important poetic voices of the Caribbean and the publication of his collected poems for the first time will be a West Indian literary landmark.

The address of the Peepal Tree Press is:
53 Grove Farm Crescent,
Leeds LS16 6BZ,
Yorkshire,
England.

Journals

Again one remarks the number and quality of the journals now appearing in the West Indies. Following are the latest issues we have received of some of these magazines.

Banja, No. 4 April, 1989—National Cultural Foundation, Barbados.

Jamaica Journal, Volume 21, No. 3, August-October, 1988—Institute of Jamaica.

New Voices, No. 34, November, 1989, Trinidad (edited by Anson Gonzalez).

Sargasso, No. 6, 1989 — University of Puerto Rico

The Caribbean Writer, Volume 3, 1989—Caribbean Research Institute of the University of the Virgin Islands, St. Croix.

Journal of West Indian Literature, Volume 3, No. 2, September, 1989—UWI, Barbados.

Carib 5, 1989—West Indies Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, UWI, Jamaica.

Archaeology and Anthropology, No. 6 (1, 2), 1989 (An Arawak—English Dictionary)—Walter Roth Museum of Anthropology, Guyana.

Those who wish to become and remain knowledgeable about the latest developments in West Indian culture and literature need to make a much greater effort to exchange amongst themselves journals such as these. It has always seemed to me that the Caricom Secretariat might play a leading role in facilitating such exchanges.

1989 Guyana Prize for Literature

Awards in the Guyana Prize for Literature, first established in 1987, were again made in 1989. The Prize has attracted great interest. In 1989 a total of forty-five entries in the categories of Poetry, Fiction and Drama were received. Winners of award were as follows:

Guyana Prize for Poetry—Martin Carter for **Selected Poems**.

Guyana Prize for Fiction—Roy Heath for **The Shadow Bride**.

Prize for First Book of Poems—Brian Chan for **Thief With Leaf**.

The judges awarded no prizes for Drama or First Book of Fiction since they felt that there were no entries in these categories that matched the standards established for Prize awards.

We are pleased to print in this issue the fine address delivered by Dr. Rex Nettleford at the 1989 Guyana Prize Awards Ceremony at the National Cultural Centre on 18th December, 1989.

Contributors to this issue

STEWART BROWN—Lecturer at Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham; has taught in Jamaica and Nigeria; editor of anthology **Caribbean Poetry Now** and joint editor **Voiceprint**; author of collections of poems **Zinder** and **Lugard's Bridge**; currently editing a critical work on Derek Walcott.

BRIAN CHAN—Guyanese poet who now lives in Canada; his book of poems **Thief with Leaf** (Peepal Tree Press, 1989) won the 1989 Guyana Prize for First Book of Poems.

MAHADAI DAS—Young Guyanese poet of great promise; MA (Philosophy) University of Chicago; recovering from serious illness; her latest collection of poems, **Bones**, was published in 1989 by the Peepal Tree Press.

McDONALD DASH—Guyanese journalist and editor for many years; poet; playwright and producer; now lives in New York.

VIBART IAN DUNCAN—Guyanese performance poet and story teller.

GLORIA ESCOFFERY—Distinguished Jamaican painter; outstanding art critic for **Jamaica Journal**; poet.

DESREY FOX—Born in the Akawaio village of Waramadon; member of the Amerindian Research Unit at the University of Guyana.

JOHN GILMORE—Historian and writer; editor of **Banja**, a magazine of Barbadian life, history and culture.

CECIL GRAY—Noted Trinidadian writer, editor and lecturer; now lives in Canada.

STANLEY GREAVES—Distinguished Guyanese painter, teacher and writer on Art; poet; now lives in Barbados.

CLEVELAND HAMILTON—Guyanese barrister and editor of the Guyana Bar Association Journal; radio commentator; poet.

WILSON HARRIS—Guyanese-born novelist and critic; fiction includes **The Guyana Quartet** (4 novels re-issued in 1985), **Tumatumari** (1963), **The Sleepers of Roraima** (1970), **Black Marsden** (1972), **Companions of the Day and Night** (1975), **Carnival** (1985), **The Infinite Rehearsal** (1987), and **The Four Banks of the River of Space** (forthcoming Autumn 1990).

ARNOLD ITWARU—Guyanese-born writer and teacher; currently a Professor of Sociology at York University, Canada; author of books of poems **Shattered Songs** and **Entombed Survivals**; in 1989 the Peepal Tree Press published his first novel **Shanti**.

- ANTHONY KELLMAN—Barbados poet and short story writer; his collections of poems include: *The Black Madonna and Other Poems* (1975), *In Depths of Burning Light* (1982) *The Broken Sun* (1984); currently teaches Creative Writing and Literature at Augusta College, Georgia, U.S.A.: Peepal Tree Press is to publish a full-length collection of his poems, *Watercourse*, this year.
- EUSIKWAYANA—Distinguished Guyanese social, political and literary critic; a leader in the independence movement of the 1950's; Member of Parliament.
- MARC MATTHEWS—Guyanese poet, story teller and actor; winner of the 1987 Guyana Prize for first book of poems; lives in London.
- SISTER MARY NOEL MENEZES, R.S.M.—Distinguished historian; author of many books particularly on the Amerindians and Portuguese in Guyana; Professor of History, University of Guyana.
- ROBERT & ALYMA MOORE—Dr. Robert Moore was Professor of History, University of Guyana, and subsequently Guyana's High Commissioner to Canada; he and his wife Alyma now live in Ottawa where he works for CIDA; eminent lecturer on third world development themes.
- ROOPLALL MONAR—Guyanese poet, short story writer and novelist; Peepal Tree Press has published a collection of short stories, *Backdam People*, a volume of poems, *Koker*, and a first novel *Janjhat*; a further collection of stories, *High House and Radio*, is due to be published in 1990.
- REX NETTLEFORD—Distinguished Caribbean scholar; Artistic Director of the Jamaican Dance Company; Pro-Vice Chancellor for International Relations, University of the West Indies, Jamaica.
- SASENARINE PERSAUD—Guyanese novelist, short story writer, poet; recently published by Peepal Tree Press. Lives in Canada.
- STEPHANOS STEPHANIDES—Native of Cyprus; 1978-1985, Senior Lecturer in English in the University of Guyana; currently works in Washington; his prize-winning translation from Portuguese to English of the nineteenth century work *British Guiana* by Adelino Neves e Mello, is soon to be published by Demerara Publishers.
- KAREN SWENSON—Professor of Literature, City College, New York; author of *An Attic of Ideas* (1974) and, most recently, *A Sense of Direction* (1989).
- RALPH THOMPSON—Jamaican businessman, poet and critic.

*Address to the Presentation Ceremony for
The Guyana Prize Awards
Georgetown, December 18, 1989*

COMMUNICATING WITH OURSELVES: THE CARIBBEAN ARTIST AND HIS SOCIETY

by Rex Nettleford

Leon Botstein, the young President of Bard College in New York recently wrote the following:

...no one in America writes except from necessity. Our ease of movement and access to the telephone have made most of our exchanges not written but rather oral, distance notwithstanding. Good news is brought in person or by voice; bad news in writing. We tell someone we love them, and we write the proverbial 'Dear John' letter. Bills, warnings, eviction notices and refusals come in writing... The relatives we wish not to see are those to whom we write. In this world, it is little wonder that no American child sees any need to become literate.

And yet the need to become literate remains a sine qua non of place and purpose in the modern world. The computer revolution will not obliterate in one fell swoop the consequences of Gutenberg. Those of us who proudly use, and disingenuously abuse, the myth of the 'oral tradition' will not escape the tenacity of the scribal imperative. Writing is not antonym to speaking. Both will continue hand in hand for a long time to come since societies like ours in the Caribbean cannot afford the neglect of any of the skills and modalities of communication with ourselves and with the rest of the world if we are to find form and purpose in sharing the human condition.

That is why I am so struck by the importance given these Awards by the Republic of Guyana not, I would imagine, in the spirit of State interventionism which many who are writers would hold suspect but rather in the deeper understanding of the centrality of the creative process, on which writers draw, to the shaping of a society and the building of a nation. That the University is so organically involved in the promotion and custodial nurturing of these Awards is also important. For I would imagine that the institution sees its role not in terms of offering yet another assembly line from which to roll off certified products who though trained may be lacking in wisdom, but more in ensuring that the generation and development of knowledge are informed by all roads to cognition including the ones which run through the creative imagination.

The country is well served by its own legacy of creative artists, not least among them the likes of Edgar Mittelholzer, Martin Carter, Wilson Harris, Jan Carew, and A. J. Seymour and his *Kyk-over-al* publication which is as legendary as the Kaieteur Falls. I would like to think that Guyana is also as well served by the Caribbean inheritance of struggle and survival through the exercise of the creative imagination.

I recently had reason to recall that one or two Commonwealth Caribbean founding fathers (in the political sense) understood the centrality of the artist to the self-government ideal and sought to appropriate the work of artists without denying to artistic action its own inner logic and consistency. Even in post-revolutionary Cuba where the ethos of the new dispensation reputedly gave to the artist everything 'within the revolution' while denying him all outside of it, the artist has managed to flourish independently, sometimes with more traces of 'bourgeois' culture than the guardians of the revolution would care to admit. Such is the power of art and the invincibility of the creative imagination!

In the English-speaking Caribbean, the independence of the artist has gone hand in hand with notions of democratic freedoms. So Norman Manley of Jamaica had in his political credo a central place for the unfettered exercise of the creative imagination, the sort of process in which artists are involved. He saw nation-building itself not only as an act of intelligence but also as the work of an artist giving form to substance and grappling with the reality of human experience to take everyday existence to higher levels of civilised expression (the nation, democracy, civilization).

He even declared (informally) George Campbell the poet of Jamaica's self-government 'revolution', as Nicolas Guillen was to become for Cuba's transformation. But the nature of the creative arts does not always depend for its flourishing on such patronage. The common people whose music, dance, theatre and oral literature rank them among the greatest of creative artists in the region, are able to continue in their myriad acts of creativity under all sorts of adverse conditions. More than that, they provide individual talents with a vital source of energy, thus giving to the region groups of creative artists in a wide range of artistic activity that has served to promise the Caribbean (or individual parts of it) greater cultural certitude, a sense of social form and of national purpose.

Foremost among such artists have been the writers—literate, healthily schizophrenic, insightful, and truly among the first to explain formally the Caribbean to itself, whether in the printed poem, novel or short story. George Lamming, a virtual dean of the corps, made early claims for the primacy of the writer as main animateur, philosopher and guide to West Indian civilization. The creative musician, choreographer, painter, sculptor were to follow in the writer's wake some of them helped not a little by the improved technologies of communication, especially the electronic media and recording industry as well as the aeroplane facilitating travel of artists and artworks within the Caribbean to Caribbean Festivals of Art (Carifestas) which began in this very Guyana in 1972 and outside the region on private commercial or government-to-govern-

ment cultural exchange tours.

The notion that all art is mediated by social reality is not a monopoly of the Marxist intellectual tradition which is understandably presented as an option in the region's earnest search for solutions. Rather, it is borne out by the facts of the Caribbean literary creative impulse. And this is so whether the declared aim of this or that writer is to be a writer rather than a Caribbean writer or to belong primarily to a 'tradition of the writer's craft; a tradition that overrides ethnic and social distinctions'. The truth is that none of these writers has been able to ignore the real-life issues of history (Caribbean history), race, colonialism, the plantation, neo-colonialism, social change, identity (national and cultural), linguistic loyalty or Europe's imposed standards of life and the awesome hold such standards have even on artists who are rebelling. Nor can they ignore Africa-in-the-Americas, the crucible in which much of what is artistically and culturally Caribbean was forged over four centuries of creolisation. Add to this the mandatory and growing sensitivity to that common ground—the essential unity of Man—challenging us to sanity as a result of the dynamic existential encounters between India, Africa, Europe and China on Amerindian soil.

Somehow it is not always understood that Mother Europe needs fewer carbon copies of Shakespeare, Moliere, Conrad, or Marlowe; of Brahms, Beethoven or Mahler; of Picasso, Van Gogh or Renoir; of Petipa, Balanchine or Bournonville. She would rather settle for the original impulse of foreign artists encouraged to enrich her soil. Walcott and Naipaul are of interest to the North Atlantic precisely because they are not only good writers but writers with something unique to say about the human condition. And where they come from and how they were socialised and bred just happen to give that something a special pitch and tone of importance and relevance to a North Atlantic world, itself in search of new patterns and new designs for its continuing existence. The pretence that it is otherwise is part of the self-parody of Caribbean artists playing others instead of being themselves.

Novels, poems, short stories, literary criticism, and plays are indeed laced with 'Caribbean' pre-occupations even if notions of the 'writer's tradition', of 'mainstream literature', or the 'humanist tradition' are considered the more desirable (and respectable) ends of artistic creation transcending, presumably, the insularity of regions or the provincialism of race and ethnic considerations. What a closer look at Caribbean artistic creation serving cultural identity may indeed demonstrate is that the so-called 'writer's tradition', 'mainstream literature' and the 'humanist tradition' are all likely to be the richer for the textured and specific contributions by Caribbean artistic infusions.

The names of George Lamming, Wilson Harris, Jean Rhys, John Hearne, Derek Walcott and V. S. Naipaul—all creatures of the colonial Caribbean—have gained fairly widespread recognition in the North Atlantic. But studies of serious world literature would be the poorer without the names of Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Victor Reid, Martin Carter, Andrew Salkey and Samuel Selvon, to name a few. The vigour of the creolised indigenous Caribbean languages must in any case determine their own criteria of judgement for artistic

excellence and universal verities; and so the lyrics of the calypsonians and reggae artists (Marley's 'Redemption Song', Jimmy Cliff's 'Many Rivers to Cross' do address universal verities in poetry), the verse of Louise Bennett, as well as the utterances of latter-day Jamaican dub poets to whom writing down is secondary to oral-rendering, all challenge the arbiters of Caribbean artistic legitimacy to new perceptions of reality in the region.

Many of the world's great artists 'steal' as a matter of course from the past if for no other reason than the past offers mankind many of the greatest that is tried and tested in the profession of art. But even in this, many a Caribbean artist has a problem. For the past from which they choose to steal does not often include their own Caribbean past either in its intensely creolised (native-born, native-bred) sense or in respect of that part of the past which spells Africa. On the other hand, that part which spells Europe, from the ancient Mediterranean to 19th century England and its extension into Anglo-Saxon contemporary United States, all have ready and willing imitators. And latecomers India, China and Lebanon are yet to be acknowledged in any deep cultural sense—what with the conflict between the earlier arrivants to the Caribbean yet to be resolved.

It may well be remembered that at least one major Caribbean artist has volunteered a justification for the neglect on the basis that there is no Caribbean history, since history is about achievement and achievement has to do with creating. So having created nothing the region has achieved nothing. In effect, the place is in the long run incapable of development, cultural identity or any meaningful growth. V. S. Naipaul's 'castrated metaphor', to use Lamming's deliciously wicked phrase, need not be seen as anything more than a rhetorical excess spat out at a society that admittedly denies too many of its citizens a sense of place and purpose. Naipaul, for all his frustrations, is nonetheless a 'creation' of that very society, and a brilliant one at that. The myths he articulates persist, however, in pockets of cynicism and cultural perversity.

Happily it is being exploded by the active creative power and brilliance of not only writers but also painters, sculptors, dancers and musicians all over the region. The creators of the Cuban son, mambo and rhumba, the devastatingly observant calypsonians of Trinidad and the Eastern Caribbean, the Rastafarian-inspired reggae composers from urban ghettos of Kingston have all 'stolen' from the past—their own past. They draw naturally on the wealth of that past ancestral certitude and wisdom to create for the modern Caribbean still in search of itself. They entertain no inhibiting doubts about the pedigree of their own history reshaped in the Caribbean and formed before the severance of forefathers from far-off homelands. And though they are conscious of the brutality of suffering in that history, they are no less aware of the achievement in terms of creative acts by their forebears-in-exile, whether in the devising of new tongues to communicate with each other, in shaping the right music, movement patterns and belief-systems into ordered rituals of worship, or in the creation of operational frameworks for daily living despite every well planned effort to keep the majority population barely ahead of the beast. Without being academic historian or sociologist of history, the Caribbean's popular artist, like some of his

prestigious writer-colleagues, effectively uses the facts of history, in all their essence, both to interpret modern Caribbean society and to inform contemporary Caribbean life. A past without achievement could not have done any of this, unless of course such acts of the creative imagination and intellect as described are not seen as genuine acts of achievement.

The evidence, indeed, demonstrates that the Caribbean with its record of creative acts can help to determine a mainstream culture rather than be expected merely to enter one that is predetermined by the cultural norms forged and recorded (i.e. in written or notated form) over centuries in the nations that conquered, colonised and conditioned subject peoples like those who inhabit the Caribbean. In overcoming the consequences of such conditioning, as a function of cultural identity or self-definition, the artists from among such peoples need to speak to each other within the region rather than continue to communicate through a connexion hooked up in London, Madrid, Paris or of late New York. If a Lamming once had to discover himself in London and an Aime Cesaire needed Paris to see the light, it has long become critical to examine and take seriously the discoveries on homeground. Derek Walcott (for all his latter-day New England encounters) and, to a certain extent, Edward Kamau Brathwaite represent something of the new breed, as do Maryse Conde of Guadeloupe and Edouard Glissant of Martinique. And the return home (physically and mentally) of Lamming and others is important to the grasp of the import of the issue of identity through artistic creation and cultural action. The Alejo Carpentiers and Nicolas Guillens stand out as homegrown icons not only for post-revolutionary Cuba but for an emerging culturally coherent Caribbean as well.

The popular artists of the ilk of The Mighty Sparrow and Michael Rudder of Trinidad or of Jimmy Cliff and the late Bob Marley of Jamaica have had no problems being homegrown Caribbean artists, secure as they have been in the knowledge that the wider world beyond the North Atlantic does provide profitable and appreciative markets for their work. They were, all three, 'heroes' at home before they were recognised abroad—in direct contrast to most of the earlier Caribbean writers who sought legitimacy and recognition, if not identity, from the metropolitan centres in the North. The increased cultural awareness among Anglophone Caribbean people following on the transfer of imperial power to the region has facilitated greater access to legitimacy and recognition at home on criteria rooted in Caribbean reality. And from this, 'schools' of painters, sculptors, choreographers, playwrights, and poets as well as creative intellectuals have benefitted not a little since the late 1950s.

The remarkable impact of Caribbean artist-musicians on the wider world with seemingly minimal concessions to the cultural dictates of the Establishment prejudices of Western civilization throws into sharp relief questions about the market for, and the nature of, Caribbean writing. Could it be that writing as an art carries with it greater burdens of alienation than do other artforms? Publishing and printing facilities are admittedly either still rare or expensive in the region. Yet more exist now than before and in any case the difficulties of

publishing abroad while writing from homebase have been largely overcome.

The question of 'the market' cannot however be ignored. Who does the Caribbean writer really write for? Does he write for the Caribbean readership still growing but yet to offer that critical mass which brings profits? Is he addressing the more affluent North American suburban class or their intelligentsia now in the throes of discovering a Walcott and a Naipaul? Does he write for the British literati with a long tradition of playing patron to sibling talents from the outposts of Empire? And what of the new governing elites of the developing world, many of whom are admittedly blase before they are civilised? Better still, does the Caribbean writer write for the proverbial homogenised world devoid of class, ethnic, or cultural particularities? Or does he write for himself? Many of the performing artists, because their art needs an immediate audience, do sing, dance and act for their own people first and for others secondarily. Can the literary arts, then, be regarded as the most appropriate for people who have been brought up in a strongly oral tradition against which has been counterpoised the scribal writ as part of a colonial conditioning?

Richard Dwyer writing in *Caribbean Review* (Fall, 1982) felt no fear of contradiction when he wrote that 'all of them [meaning Caribbean writers] know that to want to write at all is to claim citizenship in a world elsewhere'. But is this true, fair or reasonable in the contemporary world of the Caribbean which has conceded the necessity of Gutenberg and is even now in fear of the penetrative power of the aural and visual fare offered by the electronic media through television video and radio? The choreographer, the music composer, the painter, the sculptor are all constantly bombarded with reminders of the superiority of European classical dance-theatre, of Beethoven's 'unsurpassable' symphonies, of the rightness of perspective and use of colour in a Titian or a Rembrandt, and of the perfection of Greek statuary. These artists are no less vulnerable than the writer threatened with being an alien in his own Caribbean homeland. Even the 'rootsy' popular artists must come to terms with a Michael Jackson or a Lionel Richie, to name just two of the 'pop' influences of the 1980s that have demonstrated the all-pervasive power of American satellite transmission.

The Caribbean is now challenged to fall back on the inner reserves of its own historical experience and cultural dynamic in order to exist on its own terms, which is partly what cultural identity is about. The experience is indeed instructive in such fields as music, dance, painting and sculpture as well as in many of the artistic expressions associated with religious rituals, masquerade and Carnival. A great many, if not most, of the artists in these fields have been drawn largely from the unlettered commonfolk—the people from below who are traditionally marginalised and denigrated. And not even the educated writer-exiles have been able to escape the reality of Caribbean roots long after the fertiliser from the metropole has drenched their soil. All of this says something about

- (a) the arts (their role and function),
- (b) other cultural indices (such as religion, kinship patterns),

- (c) value-systems at work in the society,
- (d) identity (personal and collective),
- (e) attitudes to political authority,
- (f) the nature of economic activity, and
- (g) the interaction between all these elements in Caribbean life.

The subject of creative writing is the concern of all in our region, therefore. For so much that we have come to understand about ourselves is to be found in the drama, fiction and poetry of the Caribbean. So many of our thinkers and activists have indeed found ideal, form and purpose through the act of creative writing. For, like all other creative arts, creative writing can itself be a form of action on the road to both social integration and personal liberation.

This is not to deprive the arts of their innate authority. But the Caribbean in the process of becoming cannot afford the luxury of the balkanisation of consciousness. Western Europe, a so-called developed civilisation, is even now trying to put back together in a holistic way all of the knowledge that underpins the reality of the human condition.

The best among our novelists, poets and playwrights understand this very well. That is why they are important agents of change, growth and development both for Guyana and the rest of the region no less than are technocrats, miners, professionals, farmers, foresters, businessmen and the like.

Yet we are still to acknowledge fully the centrality of the artist qua artist to Caribbean development in particular and generally to the shaping of new societies in their quest for new designs for social living—a quest which follows on the shifts of bases of power from colonialism to independence, from the orderly and predictable world of imperial domination to the post-colonial order threatening disintegration and disorder. As I have said before, if the study of the Rastafarian movement is considered proper for a Social Science Faculty as part of the received intellectual concerns about cargo cults, redemption ethic and the like, it is no less appropriate for the self-same Faculty to engage in serious content analysis of the lyrics of a Bob Marley as guide to a fuller grasp of ghetto values, urban concerns and pre-occupations among the marginalised poor. Social commentary by the calypsonians of the society's reaction to national policies, capitalism gone mad, political authority, or the self-importance of the native inheritors of the colonial power is a form of action—expressed through art—that addresses problems of self-definition and give critical clues about a people's perception of themselves.

That perception of self has long been the substance of our poetry, drama and fiction. That "self" has long stretched beyond the geographical confines of a Guyana or a Trinidad, a Barbados, a St Lucia or a Jamaica to 'diasporas' in metropolitan climes which have tested the grit and stamina of our people, fortified their faith, and forged their self-confidence. All this has been the stuff of the products of our people's creative imagination these past fifty or so years. We must not lose that initiative on our journey into the next century.

For all these can in turn inform public and often do so no less appropriately

than the decisions arbitrarily taken for the people by political directorates and their planning advisers or the answers cleverly crafted by informants in response to cleverly crafted survey questionnaires of field researchers. Such scientific devices are useful and necessary in a modern state. But the other devices usually associated with artistic discovery are no less so.

The investment in the creative imagination must therefore go hand in hand with that which is proving increasingly vital for science and technology. I am reassured in the thought that the national significance accorded tonight's event is a signal of this country's appreciation of its obligation to its own future and to that of all of us who call this region home.

I thank you!



"STEEL DONKEY - BAJAN POLTERGEIST"

GLORIA ESCOFFERY

MOTHER JACKSON MURDERS THE MOON

Mother Jackson
sees the moon coming at her
and slams the door of her shack
so hard
the tin louvers shudder with eagerness
to let the moon in.
If she should cry for help
the dog would skin his teeth at her,
the cat would hoist his tail
and pin the moonlit sky
to the gutter;
the neighbours would maybe
douse her in chicken's blood
and hang her skin to dry
on the packy tree.
Mother Jackson
swallows her bile and sprinkles oil
from the kitchen bitch
on her ragged mattress.
Then she lights a firestick and waits
for the moon to come in and take her.

ARNOLD ITWARU

CHANT TWO

i offer you my breath at your feet
potions from the burning face
of an ancient sun

i offer you me awash in bitter rain
beyond the plots of yield and hunger
an equatorial need

ginger nutmeg pepper
ripe-breasted mango
soursop coconut sugar cane—
see how they breathe in my blood
beating in the beating of our touch

breathe in me
your body my body our body
breathe in me
breathe in me

VIBART IAN DUNCAN

TENSION RAIN

Blood pressure raise
in rage
of vexation
from pain
in the brain:

Passion flaming
fire fever
into hot rhythm:

Blade
blood drinking
in the dark
pressure drop
brap!
in the strength
of this darkness,
in de flame
of dis release from tension.

MAHADAI DAS

GOD AND THE CAT UNDER THE TUB

Man, in his diligence, made a tub of wood,
then of zinc. Having made things, he was
overjoyed with himself.

He dumped the cask to woman who cried,
'I am the washerwoman with tub and scrubboard.
No prince came my way. No knight. An empty armour'.

She hung clothes on a line
of rope, then put the bakee
Upside down on concrete outside the cottage.
Later in afternoon, I discovered cat
under the washing dish.
All I could view of her was her right front
and her left back paws.

God, like such a cat, hides from man
through his creation. He
rests and reveals only a paw
or two to man through handicraft.

TASTING SUGARCAKE

The woman upstairs bake dem.
All de schoolchildren down Mcdoom side
water dey mouth fo it.
One budget dalla it cast.
She bakes it wid de white suga the administrators
obtain cheap from Mexico.

(Lord knows what is happening when a country
who produce brown suga for all de world
can't even give he hown people molasses-rich
suga!)

So we all enjoy Miss Eunice suga-cake.
It fat an' brown with de grate coconut.
She does sit down pon top the bottom step
of Teacher Wendy house where she does live,
an' bake them. Every afternoon.

RALPH THOMPSON

WALKING AT 4 A.M.

At the Pegasus hotel I walk
(too old for jogging) in the dark,
the track picked out with cannon balls
enamelled white, half buried, looping
like a strand of imitation pearls
around the pool, cornering
the sculpture of a whitewashed rock,
levelling through a row of palms
wainscoated white, bending beside
a backless concrete bench stretched
taut as a tomb under a lignum
vitae tree whose silhouette
in this inverted moonslimed kingdom
is a skull spiked on a bark blotched neck.

At St. Elizabeth red woman
moon, arms folded across
her breast, full of bile, glares
like a jealous wife at the hotel
suspicious of infidelities.
Street lamps outside the chain-link fence
bloom like agapanthus lilies
and from this confluence of light
the shadows spring—my body breaking
at the ankles, testing the height
of hedges, sidling the trunks of trees,
scissoring the lawn with stilts. Cowled stalker,
mad monk at matins. I cloud a wave
across the pool, walking on water

No one takes title to this ancestral
path by adverse procession. Once soiled
with uncontaminated raw
black earth, bearing a jungle
on its back, before invented
epochs, before the fripperies
of tennis courts and cannon balls
it held its ground against all trespass—

the grassquit's minuet, the scorpion's
roil, footprint of Arawak
and slave. Abiding all degrees
of friction my compulsive marching
does not blister it and shadows
only stain its ancient hide.

A cloud covers the moon's cracked grin
and yellow teeth. In the demi-dark
the shadow of a tall tree's limb
feathered with leaves, dihedral wing,
undulates against the slabbed high wall
of the hotel—how many mornings
have I shared its flight,
spectral bird in perpetual
migration. Suddenly
someone speaks my name, softly
but unmistakably. A shadow
cowled like me invades the track,
for a moment mingling lip to lip
with mine, then fades to a retreating back.

"200 meters to a Guinness"—
just reward for the lurching verses
of a poet panting to his heart's
alarming S.O.S.
The giant phantom wing flaps faster
seeking sanctuary. The freshening breeze
bullies a serviette hiding
from last night's poolside party,
swirls it like a kite until
it slams against the chain-link fence
where it hangs, back impaled
high upon the wire, a white
flag of surrender fluttering
in the kingdom of the shadows

HISTORY LESSON

"Ghost" we called him:
He walked in quiet shoes.
He was so ram-rod straight
Seemed always to be holding back:
Part of his reserve, his distance
From us that preserved respect.
The love came with the teaching.
We read books they set for us,
His look was one of slight disdain.
"Be sceptical of hallowed texts:
Before you learn, convince yourselves".
He made the dust of history glow.
He read us the Periclean speech:
The Greeks were marvellously few
But down the darkened centuries
They gave light to all the world.
Our scattered nation too was small
Yet to be noble was not beyond our reach.
He traced the steps of Hannibal,
Of all men in history most magnificent,
Driving the great, grey, betowered beasts
Through avalanches of blinding ice and snow,
"I don't know how to make this live.
Imagine thrusting through the Northern Range
When wild forest stood without a path;
That might be as mad a task,
But how will you feel the bitter cold?"

The dexterous beauty of his blackboard writing
Fascinated us: it was a mystery:
The care to practise such strict art.
Why spend love on this
To be expunged before an hour was out?
We, his scholars, asked him this one day.
Of all his lessons I remember best—
The silence of the "Ghost", we knew so well,
And then the deliberate, unfading words:
"There are creatures that live half a day.
Princes of the world, do you not think
They also strive to perfect their lives?"

CECIL GRAY

THE MISSES NORMAN

The Misses Norman lived on Marine Square
just as you turn from Broadway at the corner
where now a granite bank shines like new coins;
two short white matrons that I remember
like Lord's Prayers on a rosary that joins
a knotted childhood to their acts of care.

To my young mind it seemed a threatening place.
You pierced the wooden gate through its small door
and stepped into a dimness armed with plants,
cringed up the half-gloom to the upper floor
and called good morning nervous in your pants.
But there you spoke with goodness face to face.

With thanks now rising in me like a lake
an image flashes fresh as yesterday:
a slippered sister in Edwardian dress
shuffling to hear each stanza of distress,
bribing the waiting teeth of reefs away.
It is a bonding that time cannot break.

The lifeguards of this heaving world are rare,
the sinking swimmers thick as August rain.
But one whose feet touched safety when that pair
of spinsters anchored themselves to pain
that was not theirs attempts a line of praise
in words like them, as faithful and as plain.

SASENARINE PERSAUD

A PROPHET IN HIS TIME
(Neville Robinson)

"Go forth into the world..."
he would begin
the silence, staring at a sole
Cyclist or pedestrian
Or a gorilla policeman
Aping a farmer
(burnham had just issued another
Commandment from his Orwellian
cinema—
Each soldier a citizen,
Each citizen a farmer).

The five of us would stare at each
Other somewhat laughingly
And catch a glimpse of Atlantic
Waves create fountains on the sea-wall.
Swallows dived into our souls
Birds floated into the grass of the
Next door YMCA cricket field for
Seeds...

"You see Chaucer in his way
Began a written English poetic tradi-
tion:"
restarting as suddenly as he had
stopped,
The indelibly moist North-East Trades
Offering the seed-flower-grass-sea
Scent to noses
And especially the bending thighs
Of grass to eyes.

"You have to..."
He would catch another glimpse
And stop, at times
Putting on The Cloth and sharing
Wine with us.

In the meantime we blundered on
Blind like January while
May climbed up into the pear tree
And Damyan
"Gan pullen up the smok, and in he
throng..."
His laughter left us as baffled as his
Sometimes reference
The sometimes laughter.

Once a woman came mid-lesson
To make him mortal
But the scars around his neck
Only became legend.

We left blinded Gloucester
on the cliffs.

"You may bring your poems...Chaucer..."
Lear died before our eyes
And we left for the world.
Once or twice we visited—
It was John or William street
Where they found him—poisoned
By himself—

We knew alright—though a bit too late
It was the poison of poetic genius
Gone with a stare, a look,
And neap tide laughter...

DESREY FOX (trans.)

HUNGRY CHILDREN'S SONG

Akawaio

English

Nya eewekko amai
Iiwangbee nya eejii
Nya eewekko amai
Iiwangbee nya eejii
Nya matamo amai
Ikwangbee nya eejii
Nya matamo amai
Iiwangbee nya eejii

Feed us mummy
We are hungry
Feed us mummy
We are hungry
We are dying mummy
We are hungry
We love you mummy
We are hungry

Aikninggau ya amai
Eewangbee nya eejii
Iyeewekko amai
Iyeewekko amai

JOHN GILMORE

PARISH REGISTERS

On the floor of the bell-chamber's cupboard
pasteboard, calf and paper
worms and roaches still defy.
Morocco labels, tooled in gold,
gleam like wedding rings in duppy dust.
Heaps of paper, blotched and mottled
as the freckled features of an overseer,
list so many names:
Susan, here baptized,
"Child of Apprenticed Labourer",
her role in life predestined.
John and Martha, joined in wedlock,
Field-hands both, of Such-and-Such Estate.
Peter the fisherman,
died in the almshouse.
No other monument have these
whose labour built our land,
but yet the doors are shut upon their muted voices
whilst in the church below
their posterity, serge-suited,
sit in mahogany pews
and worship an alien God.

ANTHONY KELLMAN

WATERFALLS

Here at Papilotte, the rainforest retreat,
the hugging hills are peopled with myths.
Shocks of green are punctuated by animated honks
of fat friendly geese. A peacock's palace
fans three sculptured dragons
to the waterfalls' minuets, ruk-a-tuk and humming cataracts:
a cleansing which finds irrigational core
in the sulphurous falls of Trafalgar,
the animal with the healing hoof
that can sprawl you out
and pelt you onto the city's roof
like a piece of timber.
"It 'tweel keel you", a manchild of eleven said
knotting a sheep's leash in the rain,
his brown eyes as knowing as the goat's we saw
squatting on a fern-wrapped hillside.

In this heartland,
most children spring from the lily valleys,
their schoolhouse, a hilltop
Montgomery where my primary lessons were gained.
The girls gliding the hill by Miss Browne's shop
giggled at the world in navy-blue starch-stiff uniforms,
skipping and dancing behind each stranger
with the lively curiosity of their age....
and now two boys advance toward me,
steeped in conquistadorial morality.
They fly with contoured skill to fetch,
as a native gift, five yellow cocoa pods
and to further impress me suck
the pitch of their ripened catch
and push-up their mannish chests
that open my wallet at last.

In Roseau, rust oozes
from the hinged sores of almost every building.
Everywhere, the tattered look of soldiers
limping into makeshift barracks.
Houses are built to find graves
at nature's hands and those who come after David
cannot understand these older faces of drooping ferns
clutching the historic topsoil.

MARC MATTHEWS

MRS MANIVER

mother scalasticer
sister surperior
of queen's town
she was a
giver
she gave up
her
wedding gown
gave up
washing dishes
gave up
her wishes
her reading glasses
her staying at home
started jus'
walking around
deciphering psalms
she was a

giver

giving praises
singing psalms
praying for
guyana from seawall
through georgetown
she was a

giver

gave up today
for a tomorrow
hoping that better
would come
but
she was a

giver

among a task
force ah
who took what
she gave
left her to rave
with nothing
left to

give

but silence
now left
mrs maniver
she was a

giver

finally gave
up
her tongue
gave

up her
desire
to right

wrongs
gave up
today
gave up
tomorrow
gave up
future
gave up
her
clothes
gave up
her bathroom
to wash in main's
street gutter
opposite
tower
witnessed by
taxi drivers
mrs maniver
mother scalasticer
gave up
forever
gave up
shamed them
to laughter
but she'd long
given up
caring one way
or
other
given up
all
to
get
her
everything but
wandering around
in disguises
from seawall
through
georgetown.

BRIAN CHAN

PEGASUS

Standing on
the shore I am
I am no more
than the evening waves that invent my ears,
than the wind that is the silence of my voice,
than the sea that comes
in the sand (denying it
its temptation to turn
into the desert or into another
rock of salt), sand absorbing
sea's power, draining
its pain, filtering
its filth. Standing on
the shore I am all
that and no
more.

Flying beyond
the coast, I am all that and
the morning cloud that climbs
from behind the wide edge of the world
to tame and shame and shadow and so
sculpt the lazy wisdom of the sea
into a scaled knowledge of itself,
of its restless bed,
of its yawning green tongues,
of its walking fruits of unpeeled
acid and sugar, of their naked
roofs like scabs of baked blood
that through surrender, temper and become
the persistent indifferent lord and servants,
the patient parent and sons
of light itself, no less.



" MASSACURAMAN - GUYANA RIVER DEMON "

NEW YORK NINETY EIGHTY NINE

by McDonald Dash

It.... is such an extraordinary socio-geometaphysical configuration that they had to name it twice, thusly—New York, New York. It is everybody's kind of town and an absolute state of mind.

It is Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, Staten Island and Manhattan which is an island. And then there's Long Island City which is not in Long Island and Lefrak City which is no city at all, and Long Island which is in Queens, but not spiritually.

There are all the islands in the streams of the East and Hudson rivers and in the angry Atlantic,—Rikers which is a penal colony, and Randall's where they play cricket betimes, Liberty, Governor's, Roosevelt, and Ellis where CLR James was incarcerated in the fifties before being deported.

It is a tie-dye of seven and one half million survivors with seven and a half million fantasies and an equal number of nightmares. Lots of times the nightmares are realised, more often than the disney-dreams anyway.

It is known as the Big Apple. To the cognoscenti as the Big Rotting Apple.

Think of it what you will, and call it what you wish, it is still everybody's kind of town and then some.

New York is a city of neurotics and pizza huts; Lena Horne; Park Avenue; Mike Tyson roaming in the early dawn; Bloomingdale's and Baryshnikov; cocaine, crack addicts, crackpots, stretch limousines and yellow taxi monsters on the one-way freeways of Manhattan during the lunch hours; Central Park; Harlem on hot summer nights; verbal acrobatics at the Appollo; Cab Calloway and the Aqueduct racetrack, the homeless and the hapless and those without hope who are also the homeless and the hapless; Waldbaum supermarkets, Boesky, Milken and other Wall Street banditti; the vulgarity of megamillionaire Donald Trump and the viciousness of rampaging youth gangs; trigger-happy cops and gun-toting public school kids; million (multi)-dollar lotteries; the trash television of Morton Downie, jnr. and Geraldo; Chinatown, Koreatown, Vietnamtown, Sikhtown, Pakistantown, Little India in Jackson Heights; Little Haiti on Brooklyn's Eastern Parkway; Nostrand Avenue and Little Port-a-Spain; Barbados-in-the-suburbs; Corentyne-in-Jamaica; Japanese-owned office complexes, that in a Hammerstein refrain "reach way up to the sky".

It is the alpha and omega of good taste and bad taste. And then there is the state of unconsciousness.

But New York is Raghu spaghetti sauce, salad bars, sechuan bars, gourmet foodcenters, Chinese kitchens, Jamaican patties and jerk pork, kosher meats and Italian cheeses; puertorican mom-and-pop delis; Bojangles fried chicken, a billion daily cups of coffee and Madison Square Garden; La Guardia and JFK; Forest Hills and the West Side Tennis Club; the vast public library at 5th Avenue and 42nd Street which is the street of porn, pee-pers, pimps, assorted molls and

trolls; Greenwich Village, SoHo and the South Street Seaport, the New York Mets, a black commissioner of police with a white shadow, the South African musical *Sarafina* which is so moving and telling that it bleeds real smoke and bullets at the Cort theater on 48th; Carnegie Hall; Frankie and Sammy and Liza; the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), the Whitney, and graffiti showplaces; Clavin Klein, AIDS and the attendant discriminatory practices at some of the city's hospitals; the huge shortage of nursing help; orthodox Jewry; seven-dollars-a-seat movie shows on Third Avenue.

The Statue of Liberty.

Bridges across rivers.

Trees that still grow in Brooklyn.

Nathan's still famous Coney Island hotdogs.

Macy's.

The Mafia.

Murder.

Haagen-Daaz ice cream in yuppie flavours.

With all this you are entitled to a free medium serving of french fries. Or two pieces of Kentucky Fried. Or a Big Mac or a Burger King. Or a Wendy with sliced tomato.

And the topping?

You get the ubiquitous Ed Koch. Hizzoner. Mayor Marvelous. Mayor Monstrous. The only man who could speak out of the five sides of his mouth at the same time and still say zilch, nihil, nada. Ees no beeg teeng.

He is the consummate political animal; an empty barrel. The Bachelor of Gracie Mansion. Koch is several things to several people—circus clown, highwire artist, racist, cronyist, astute, devious, supposedly gay, intelligent most certainly, honest and venal, glittering and gloomy, sad and secretive, devouring and demonstrative.

He is a grumbling, grouchy, garrulous garbagecan of a man who has old nostrums for new and radical problems. But with his rotundity and friar-tuck head, he is New York with all its illnesses, idiosyncracies, and joggers.

You cannot only see New York. You can taste it and smell it, and sometimes you want to make love to it.

That's what it does to you. Sometimes. Everybody's kind of town, man.

PORK EATER

by Rooplall Monar

Crabbe really feel he woulda piss his pants this bright Saturday midday when Jamila father was chasing him with an hackia stick, shouting in the street, "Yuh Hindu dog yuh! Yuh playing like at me daughta. And yuh not even own de shirt and pants on yuh skin...."

Crabbe foot was quick, quick more than lightning, scooting thru the fine street which get big-big hole, and donkey shit, while he blowing he ha he ha as though his heart about to fall-out his body, cursing damn stinking in his mind.... is how the blasty man see when me throw a talk at Jamila? Is how? Me know that man is a murderer....

As Crabbe hit the fine street, blacksage bush and carrion-crow bush growing by the edge, he believe he safe, so he slack his pace, turning back slow-slow but he want drop dead. Dead as a doornail. His eye open big-big, glistening like marble when he see Jamila father close-up to his heels, growling, "tink me want any Hindu dog touch me daughta?" dangling the deadly hackia like the sword of Damocles.

God! Crabbe see his body split-open in two like a dry coconut with one lash from a cutlass, knowing fully well how much people done taste Jamila father hackia stick. And me just start wear long pants, and pissing fraff, Crabbe tell himself, and pickup a sudden speed thru the fine street, cursing the very moment his heart fall for this Jamila.

"De next time me see yuh round me yard is murderation," Jamila father shouting, threatening, slowing his pace, and feeling his heart going bap bap bap just like a water-pump when it drawing water out a koker. Them young boy eye get fire, Jamila father tell himself, sitting down in the fine street where black ants and cap-cap showing no mercy for them dead dog and cat which people does throw in the street, hawking and spitting, the smell want to kill you whenever the breeze blowing.

But look how trouble does come to yuh doorstep, eh? Jamila father talk, feeling his heart-beat going down slow-slow like water draining out a swamp-field. They always say girl children is trouble. Never know why Allah had to give me wife one girl child? Soon as you own daughta jump-in fourteen year, you have to watch she with two-eye. Tink me want shame come in me house? Hindu boy play like at me Jamila? Never. Hindu people is pork-eater, and they mind bad like nasty trench water. Them is infidel. Never know why Allah couldn't burn them out....

Now Jamila father shake his head, rubbing-rubbing the hackia stick lovingly, then watch thru the fine street which end by a dutty dam that lead straight to the seabeach, and swear on his dead daddy name, if me ever hear any pork-eater Hindu boy playing fresh at me Jamila, me murder he for a song.

Then he get up, feeling his bones crackling like dry bamboo joints in a hot

merciless sun, and head for his home, walking slow-slow, fearing the back-pain he get for years which does give him shivers in the night, believing his own death lurking by the doorstep like a shadow. And the blasted doctor only giving me ointment, ointment....

Can't be lie. Is them bottom-house Christian church causing all this confusion in them young people head. True! Me want to know if this Jesus Christ going to give them young people salvation? Eh? Is damn-well eye-pass on the muslim religion, Jamila father whisper when he about to turn into his yard. Is since this country get Independence all this confusion come. Heh! One people, one nation, one destiny... is how Muslim, and Hindu could be one people? How blackman and whiteman could be one people, eh? People not fall-down from tree-top you know. They come from somewhere as me daddy say, like mango from the mango tree. And is you duty to keep-up you religion, you custom. Is the only thing that make you a people. Eh! look how everybody coming scatter like birds when you throw a rockstone at them? People not even value theyself this time. They running from here to there, not even upkeeping they religion in the right way. Is how you could be one people when this country have blackman, Chineseman, Putagee man, coolie man? Is the damn Independence thing, and the Christian bottom-house causing all this corruption... you don't know in which direction you going. Where the wind really blowing from. Is important, me commonsense tell me, that you hold-on tight-tight on you religion if you want walk in the road with you head showing high high....

Now, soon as Jamila father walk-in the house, and curse, "Hindu dog," Jamila start tremble like leaf in the kitchen, seeing them blows she father might rain-down on she skin (which is fairish and smooth like marble) blaming she, as if she been tell Crabbe to throw a talk at she. Mind you, she know she is not a duncify goat ever since she left primary school a year now after she father tell she: "is time to learn sewing and get married. Muslim girl children don need eddication."

Is damn true! she monkey-smart for she age-group—fourteen years old—and she could buy and sell them girls she age-group with deep commonsense. And she know, from the time she bubby start come out like plum, and she hips getting broadish, that boys going to give she a second-look, blowing a whistle and saying as if they eye want to pop-out, "gosh, this girl round like plumrose...."

Is not me fault if boys like me, she does tell she self everytime she done bathe in the evening and anchor in front the bedroom mirror, powdering she skin exact like a mother powdering a baby skin. Afterwards she would size-up she hips, then touch-touch she nipple, feeling real big-womanish, saying again is not she fault if boys like she.

Then as a usual habit, the evening turning into night, and you hearing pots and pans scrambling in the neighbourhood kitchens, dogs barking in the street while them children playing games, and a group of women talking names, squatting by a front bridge with the moon rising, looking like one copper coin, Jamila would switch-on the bed room light, regaling in the bed, then go through them Filmfare and Screen magazines which she does hide under the bed

mattress during the day.

She know damn-well if she father eye, which reddish and spiteful as if the whole world against him, only drop on them magazine that, is licks to pease on she and she mother, who she father always say does keep company with Hindu women, and not Muslim women which is she own-own people especially in this time where "people putting religion in they back door. Hanging they mouth where the soup leaking while them politicians telling you one people, one nation, one destiny, when is six to seven people living in de country...."

Yes! Jamila know she father damn straight like house-post bout he religion, going to the masjid punctual every evening, rain or sun, insisting to she own self and brother Nazir that they family is upright Muslims, blood "pure like creek water, and is Allah's will, that such things should be never mind yuh all don live in Pakistan or Arabia...."

And Jamila acquainted with she father mood which does raise sudden like a big wave in the ocean especially when he hear, and see for himself too, that this time young people believe they live in Town where all the badness going-on, and you character come like the street you walking upon where lovers kissing by a tree-corner, a woman cussing down another woman, beggarman sleeping on cardboard, children walking hungry belly, drunkmen pissing by the pavement....

Yes! she know she father always ensure that before she and she brother go to bed in the night, they must say the namaz, and must always know which genie is the guardian spirit. Must observe the prophet birthday, and dress like true muslim-born whenever they attending another muslim religious work. "Is not what yuh have in dis world. Eh-eh! is the way yuh conduct yuhself. And when yuh walk a road people must know yuh character clean like white cotton," she father does tell Nazir soon as them boys come call at he to play softball cricket in the pasture on rainy Sundays.

"And going to cinema is disease. It corrupting yuh thinking. Make yuh a tool, not a human being." Jamila father does suck his teeth and talk sometime, watching the street from inside his front verandah, wishing all cinema burn-down like in '63 race riots where the races been murdering each other because of politics.

So Jamila know she can't make she father see them Filmfare and Screen magazines at all, else is murderation in the house while she mother have to lock she fat self in the next bedroom, dare not opening she mouth as she heart going abap abap, and she belly turning inside like rockstone grazing concrete.

Never know why me father turn like a beast, Jamila does tell she self morning, noon and night, trying hard not to let them young boys like Crabbe and Saucepan and Basil throw sweet-talk at she when she out the house in the street, else is sheer murderation for true, and she father might get bruk-neck after the magistrate done sentence him to death.

"Jamila, you not seeing you daddy not thinking right anymore," she mother does tell she under the house evening time after she father gone to masjid. "Like the man lost something ever since the imam join politics, and he

daughter friending with one minister. Yes! You daddy say the whole committee member in masjid is top-top mussulman who trading the faith fo money, and position. True-true, me think is this kind a attitude turn you father mind into a rockstone. He believe the imam betraying the religion...."

But why take out he passion at me, Jamila does tell she self, seeing in broad daylight how them other muslim girls she age-group laughing and talking openly with boys, dressing the way they feel, going to the cinema when they mind feel like it, and eating any damn thing they tongue fancy: pork, beef, mutton, chicken....

"This is modern times, eh," Jamila friends them does talk.

Like me coming me father eye-pass, Jamila ask she self one night during which time Crabbe start playing like at she. And it all happen in a funny way months back one early midweek night by the street. She was coming home from the shop with a loaf of bread in she hand, and out of nowhere, Crabbe clasp she by she back, when she about to walkpass the fine street where it darkish, and he hug she tight-tight, whispering in she ears, "me love you bad-bad girl Jamila." Then Crabbe let-go she, and vanish like a spirit. She been just quit schooling, and she bubby start coming out.

That night Jamila couldn't sleep good even though the rain fall later, which send them stray dog and cat indoors. Yes! she turning and twisting in bed like she get stinging-nettle, wondering if she turning into a big woman. Is from then, she start take interest in she looks, borrowing them Filmfare and Screen magazines from she friends them who does imagine truly them is one of them female filmstars, doing-up they face with sweet-smelling powder and lipstick, trying to see theyself on the cinema screen.

And you dare not tell Jamila girl friends them about such things as going to the temple or masjid, wearing ornhni, and you must greet you elders in such ways: "Ram Ram," or "assalam-ul-kum," showing deep respect.

Eh-eh, straightway like a fine, straight bridge, them girls would pout they lips, put they hands on they waist which curve-in, and say, "tink we uncivilize? This is different time. Hindu and muslim is one people, and we have to tink ahead. Be in the style...."

Then, them girls would swing-round, dress-bottom swaying like open umbrella, winking they eye like sakiwinkee, and say, "we not living in India or Pakistan. We live in a modern country where people speaking English, you hear."

And you talking bout dressing? Eh, them girls more flashy than torchlight, high-heel shoes pointed like needles, lips more reddish than blood while the Avon perfume want stifle you nose.

And them girls conversation does revolve round the latest in fashion, bout film stars, which man living with which woman in the village, who throwaway belly for who, which girl playing nice as if she foot don't touch de ground girl; and about boys in the village who playing big man as if he "crotch getting heavy. He want wife...."

This time, them girls can't spell A to bullfoot properly, but whenever they

talking to strangers, winking-winking they eye, you going to believe all to God they been to College. True! the English word in they mouth more crispy than salt biscuit: "I has a beautiful dress. You looks good...."

All the while, Jamila does feel left-out as if she pen-up like a sheep. And she dare not mingle-mingle too much with she friends, dress-up, or even get antics like them. True! she father eye like hawk whenever he is home, and Jamila friends them dare not mingle-mingle in she yard while she father looks turning spiteful.

"Yuh is a straight muslim child. Me don want yuh to mix-mix with them young girls who tink they get wings... Bad name quick to come at yuh doorstep. Me want walk with me head high in the street...." Jamila does suck she teeth quiet-quiet whenever she father throw them words in she face which done swell-up like a dead fish belly.

Sometimes Jamila does want to know what is so special bout she, cursing this muslim thing, wishing to God she was a Hindu girl like she friends them. Then, in she lonely moments, relaxing in the hammock under the house, breeze blowing real sweetish from the seaside, ruffling them leaves and flowers in people front yards, she does see what a selfish and domineering father she has. Is anything upsetting the man.

"Birthnight party. But is what me hearing? Any decent muslim girl going to birthnight party?" Them words still etch in Jamila mind like carvings on a rockstone when she father been rant and rave that Sunday afternoon, the foam dribbling on his lips, while she mother take cover under the bed in the bedroom, trembling, seeing the slap she would get Blai from she husband if she only say, words sweetish like honey, "is what wrong with birthnight party, man? Is she own friends them invite she...."

Me father like a real pig, Jamila does tell she self, seeing how she pen-up like a bird in a cage, couldn't even give she mouth some liberty self whenever them Christian clap-hand people walking around the village, asking for donation, saying, "hallelujah, the Lord's my shepherd...."

"The Lord's my shepherd! Bah! Muhamad is de last and greatest of prophet," she father does tell them Christian people, mouth frame in real hatred, ordering Jamila to close the front gate forthwith. "Tink me have money to give Christian people...."

"If me don have strong faith, me drop down and dead," Jamila mother does tell she self one-two in the kitchen, calling on Allah, the all merciful, to change she husband dogish attitude. "Is how long me going to live like this?"

She know damn-well a muslim suppose to serve she husband dutifully, because according to the Koran book, a woman is lower than a man in status. But is not so one time, she does tell she self in bed whenever she eye drop to sleep. If you talk too hard, this man want to slap you Blai. If you want to go a roadside this man turning like gorilla. If you want to attend one Hindu people wedding, this man telling you, "them Hindu people does eat pork."

O God Allah! is where you hiding?

Was during this time Crabbe start throwing tackle at Jamila, telling she in

words sweet like honey how she face round like the moon in the sky, lips soft as sponge, the eyes real inviting as nectar to them bees...

Eh-eh, don't talk how Jamila does feel nice as though she want to walk in the clouds everytime Crabbe walk-past in front she house, spot she in she front verandah and dish out them words like water out a standpipe.

Yes! she does feel real big-womanish after Crabbe gone his way, and she dash into the big bedroom, smiling a trench-water smile, examining she face in the mirror which she know smooth like carpet, then fingle-fingle she bubbly which does get a bit hardish, telling she mind, she really turning a big woman for true; and is not she fault whenever them boys throwing a tackle at she. Is why me father must swell-up like crapau?

And Crabbe was more persistent in his demand than all them young boys his age-group—seventeen, eighteenish, who does throw a tackle at Jamila, watching first though like cat if Jamila father under the house, polishing his hackia stick, or throwing a curse at them fowls if his reddish eye only catch them digging-up the flower plants, growing in the front yard.

Well! it so happen then that Jamila come accustom to hearing them sweet-sweet words rolling out Crabbe mouth. True! Sometimes she does feel like fish out of water if a day or two pass, and this Crabbe didn't walk-past, and throw out them sweetish words which does soothe she inside real nice like oil rubbing on baby skin, though she know damn-well, Crabbe is a Hindu boy learning motor-mechanic, and she is a muslim girl, and marriage between the two of them could never take place in this village where inter-marriage between the two religions is a taboo. Yet, Crabbe does make she day wonderful in that pen-up life she dogish father get she inside...

God! me even can't watch out the window too long, Jamila does say, the tears heavy in she heart, turning Filmfare and Screen magazines with passion, wishing she was a bird so she could fly away far far...

But this Saturday midday poor Crabbe believe Jamila father aim was to split-open his head in two like coconut with his hackia stick which some people say Jamila father been wash with deadman water.

"If dat man only lash yuh with dat stick, coh-coh beh sore buss-out yuh skin, and no docta could cure it," people does talk about Jamila father hackia stick, trying they best not to vex Jamila father who would run quick time for the hackia soon as people raise his nerves just like what Crabbe did just now.

True! after Crabbe turn-in the fine street, sit-down between the carrion-crow bush and blacksage bush, knowing Jamila father can't find he, blowing like racehorse, Bull words hit his eardrums like bullet: "You better keep away from Jamila daddy. That man have real Arab blood in he. And you know them Arab quick fo murder? Rememba the hackia stick?"

But me spirit proper take Jamila, Crabbe talk, cussing-up them black ants which murdering his skin while he peeping thru from inside the bush to see if Jamila father vanish into thin air as he does wish day and night, praying too, that Jamila father get paralysis. God! is how long he going to pen-up Jamila like that? He don't know she is a big girl...

And true to God! don't matter how hard Crabbe try to blank out Jamila out his mind, trying to see them other girls like Kunti, Zorina, Champa, who get exact size and shape like Jamila, the tactics never come thru. This Jamila like one real spirit. She does haunt he day and night, and whenever Kunti or Champa come in his mind, Jamila does enter like one fairy, looking so charming that in comparison, Kunti and Champa does look like real old maid, black, uglyish and squingy like quash in dry weather.

And if Crabbe only empty his true feelings to Bull and Pox, quick time them boys going to say, "Crabbe, like you getting typee fo the woman," laughing he he he... "they have plenty fishes in the ocean you know. And watch the hackia...."

This time, Bull and Pox throwing a tackle like wildfire all about the place never mind them girls, who swaying they behind like it get spring, sputtering some nasty curses at them, saying, "woman don't want man who only get shirt and pants, you hear."

But Bull and Pox, and them boys, know the tackling-game rough like river water, and soon as you slide, you fall like bush hog blashai! They know this time young girls mouth hot like pepper, dressing flashy like gold in you teeth-plate, and sputtering English as though they pass College, but luck does blow good wind at them boys in-between. They does manage to squeeze-thru a feel-up, or a kiss-up from Kunti or Zorina, dark evening time by the street-junction, by a front bridge, or under a tree, growing by the edge of the drain.

And don't talk how them chaps does feel nice whenever they assert they manhood in such a way. Eh-eh! you going to believe all to God, they turn big man overnight, willing they moustache to grow, talking with a drawl, cigarette stick between they lip. "Boy! when me knock the kiss at Kunti lip, me feel me in Heaven self...."

But Crabbe is not so big mannish. His voice soft like velvet, and he always get a frightenish look, and he would disappear quick time whenever fight breakway in the street, paling stave and bruk-bottle firing wild, blood dripping like water from roof top while them woman screaming for murder....

Now, it come a time when Crabbe couldn't even pass a day without seeing Jamila face, else he crack-up like dry bamboo, getting all kind of bad dreams in the night. But he couldn't disclose his true feelings to Bull and Pox cause quick time them boys going to say, "it have plenty fishes in the ocean you hear!"

"And be careful! Sometime the girl must be throw one spell at you. And remember the hackia stick...."

And Crabbe need some advice badly. True! is how he could get at Jamila without she father not knowing a damn thing? And he was certain like day that follow night, that Jamila feelings did come-in for him never mind of this Hindu-muslim thing she father believe in, like leech on a dog skin.

Me have to get Jamila, Crabbe said one night during which time Throat son hang himself to death with a rope, after he catch his fat, darkskin wife with a man on top she belly by the seabeach one Sunday evening, people say, crying bitter tears, beating they chest. "Ow me Gaad! Throat son was an angel...."

"Them nowadays woman eye get fire...."

Crabbe was going to Throat son wakenight when he tell himself, me have to get Jamila, thinking which biggish boy going to advice him in the proper way so he could tackle Jamila smart like cat without she father knowing a damn thing. Ah! to hell with he hackia stick.

Couple days later, Crabbe jump at Billy who he know does tell them boys how to throw a tackle at girls. Yes! Crabbe know this Billy tongue sweet like honey, and rumour had it that Billy friending with somebody wife who does give him money. You see, Billy don't work. People say he get sweet-skin, and he dressing and walking like a millionaire son. But they ain't know Billy get one ambition. He want to go to America where he hear the Yankee dollar flowing in the street like water, and white women is two fo three cent.

Some nights, this Billy does imagine seeing himself in America, walking in Times Square and Central Park, playing big-ass at them villagers who he know living in New York. Is them alone could live in America?

And whenever Billy mother saying to him, "but Billy, is why yuh nuh get one job, married and settle-down...."

Eh-eh! Billy does act like when you raise-up antsnest. His eyes does pop out, and his face turn reddish.

"Tink a job could pay you now when rice selling fo thirty dolla a gallon, kerosene fo twenty-two dolla a gallon, flour fo eight dolla a pound, eh? Is why you tink everybody going to America and Canada? Is fo betterment sake, you hear. And by hooks or crooks, me have to get over there...."

Billy old mother who bones does rattle when she walking, does suck she teeth, then slump in the hammock everytime Billy declare his intention.

O Gad Bhagawan! is what America and Canada have? Once you make up you mind fo work hard, you bound to get by in life. God is not blind like goat... Billy mother does tell she self one-two time, wishing dearly one big wave flood-up America and Canada. Is then, them sweet-skin people going to tie they belly and work hard. True! Never know why this country come so wrong-sided? O Bhagawan! me just want Billy get married, then me could be in me grave in peace....

Crabbe know Billy get one rep as though he study women too bad. Is Billy self does tell them growing-up boys how to sweet-talk girls, how to kiss them on they ears, how to exhale wind behind they back, how to stroke-stroke they hair just like when you stroking a cat skin; and how to tongue-kiss them, "rolling you tongue first on they lip, you hear...."

And Crabbe know some of them growing-up boys who wearing long pants, did get thru smooth and easy with them hot-mouth girls, who in the long-run, did end-up eloping with some of them boys, though at first, some of them boys had to endure them girls' mooma mouth. "Tink woman want man who nuh get future?"

"De next time me catch you by me front bridge, is one broadside you getting. Yuh could work to mind wife, eh?"

So Crabbe deadsure he is on safe ground. He have to get Jamila, and Billy

is the only man who know the tactics.

"Write a love-note man," Billy tell Crabbe by the street-corner, a bit further away from the group of bigger boys, sitting on the parapet where grass lice tearing you skin.

Crabbe swallow his spittle, feeling the dryness in his throat. Love-note! Is who going to take it to Jamila? He wait until one-two people done walk-past, and explain the dilemma to Billy.

Ah! Billy spin-round like bucktop, and smack his tongue chu chu chu as though he feel too sorry for Crabbe. "Is small matter man. Get a small boy to drop the note to the girl, and you problem done. Then she going to reply back to you, and bam, the love-business start...."

Is true-true thing! Crabbe shake his head. This man Billy know everything bout tackling. You only have to use you commonsense. Good! Crabbe smile now and say, "me going to do exactly what you say."

"And don't worry bout the Hindu-muslim ting. Nowadays young people nuh care who is Hindu or Muslim," Billy say, then he join them boys who talking about Canada and America, and the U.S dollars. "Yuh nuh hear Deochand get two car, and Pran get a posh house?"

"And imagine Paul was de biggest lazy man. They say de man get a lot a money in de bank, and a white woman...."

"O Boy, New York!"

But is the love-note that really cause a murderation between Jamila father and Crabbe father one bright Sunday evening while them children was playing hopscotch and skipping in the street, and them shirt-tail small boys poking fun at a donkey by a drain which braying and bucking.

Boy! that was a scene to talk about. Jamila father look as if fire burning his skin. He turn real reddish, and like a cross-dog, he swaying his hackia stick like stickfighter in the street, in front Crabbe father house, shouting, "come out yuh Hindu dog. Yuh planning to bring shame in me doorstep? Love-note! Yuh good-fo-nothing son writing love-note to me daughta. Me is a true-born Muslim. Tink me want any Hindu bad blood poison me family? If yuh son crotch getting heavy, yuh better cut it out. And if yuh want me take jail, keep yuh son away from me daughta, yuh hear! And come out if yuh is a man...."

This time, Jamila father done lock-up Jamila and she mother in the house, after giving Jamila one stinging slap, shouting, "yuh want Hindu man, nuh? Me going to clip yuh wings like bird." Then he turn to his wife who short and fattish, screaming on top she voice, and let-go a broadside on she behind with the garden cutlass, shouting, "If yuh was proper Muslim woman this eye-pass could never going to happen. Is how yuh tink me going to raise me head in masjid?"

Soon after, Jamila father mad-blood raise-up. He sputtering stinking curses as he fumbling for his hackia under the house, heart palpitating. When he walk out his yard, he shout his wife name, and say if he only catch she in the street, he going to murder she....

Meanwhile, the street come clear like daylight within a minute after them

children and them one-two women, spot Jamila father trotting thru, raising the hackia stick like a warrior about to charge. True to God! them children and woman scramble for they yard, shuddering with fright just like rats seeing a cat.

"O Gad Allah! that man mad-blood raise. Is somebody he want to kill," them women say, rushing into they house after closing the door, lock and key. "He have the hackia stick...."

And you would think Jamila father own the bloody street, parading like Lord God in Heaven.

All the while, Crabbe father, who small and fine like stick, working his mouth in his house while his wife clutch he by his waist, saying, "you not see that fullahman mad! God shoulda never give he one daughta. And he have the hackia stick...."

"But dis is downright rass-pass, woman," Crabbe father quarrelling but like he dread to show his face in his front verandah. He too, know about the hackia stick and the deadman water while Crabbe done disappear out the house thru the backdoor, cursing Billy all the curse he know.

And not one neighbour self going out to make peace. Everybody know Jamila father hasty like jackass and stubborn like mule, and ignorant like Mactool, knowing fully well about the hackia that could send you to you grave with just one lash Bladai!

And if you hear the boast-an-brag words flying out Jamila father mouth... me is true born mussulman. Me blood run straight to Mecca. And pork-eater is infidel, de lowest of all nation....

When Jamila father realise that Crabbe father would not come out his house, he stamp his foot in passion, wave the hackia stick, and say, "tell yuh son me going to get charge fo murder." Then he walk away, cursing his daughter. "Yuh want Hindu man...."

Later that night, Crabbe get a proper cut-rass from his father promising him on his knees, that he going never again play-like at a Muslim girl. "Yuh crotch getting heavy nuh," his father say, firing the bamboo rod all across his back. "Rememba, we is Hindu people, eh!"

Two days later, mouth open and story jump out. It was all Crabbe stupidity. When he give shirt-tail Rueben the love-note to hand Jamila, he didn't insist on his knee to Rueben and say, "see to it that Jamila get this note from you." Never. Rueben say Crabbe tell he to drop the note at Jamila house. That was how the note drop into Jamila father hand. Yes! Jamila father was weeding the front yard that afternoon when Rueben call out for Jamila. So come Jamila father accosted Rueben and get the note.

Eh-eh! don't talk how them boys laughing at Crabbe stupidity after Rueben explain the story. Crabbe does feel like hiding, seeing how he is a mocking stock.

One midmorning he was going to throw himself in the sea soon after the news fly in his ears, that Jamila gone to spend a couple months by she aunt in Enmore village. She father force she to go, people say, with a cutlass over Jamila head.

Is true thing! Crabbe been really want to throw himself in the sea that midmorning, or get-out the village for a long time, good thing Billy and himself happen to cross path as though God self intervene on his behalf.

Chu chu chu... Billy smack his tongue. "You stupid. Just find out in which street Jamila auntie live, and take walk one-two weekends. Eh-eh! you is a big man. You wearing long pants, and you handling money. And if you really want Jamila, you bound to get she...."

Crabbe shade his head, walking away from the seadam, smiling. Me have to get Jamila, he swear, feeling strength seeping in his body, and deep-deep courage in his face. Yes! Me could get a job, and mind she... send she to learn sewing. True! And to hell with the Hindu-muslim thing. Love far above that. Yes! me going all out for Jamila....

THE POETRY OF FRANK A. COLLYMORE

by A.J. Seymour (June, 1981)

I've recently read again the century of poems that Frank Collymore published in three books in the 1940's—*Thirty Poems* (1944), *Beneath the Casuarinas* (1945), and *Flotsam* (1948), and I'm not sure that the critics have done full justice to the poetry he has produced.

There are reasons for this, of course. Colly was a greatly respected teacher at Combermere College in Barbados for fifty years and he sought out and encouraged many well-known and influential writers. He must have been generous in assessments and a very good teacher. He was editor of *BIM* in its most formative years and so helped to introduce to Caribbean readers the majority of our best known writers. He established lines of personal correspondence with people in many parts of the world, symbolising unfailing courtesy and sympathetically answering their questions, and setting out the main areas of all the region's writing. One issue of *Savacou*, the magazine edited by Edward Brathwaite, was devoted on his 80th birthday to *A Tribute to Frank Collymore*. In the book *A Companion to West Indian Literature* compiled by Michael Hughes, Colly's poetry is described as "minor, but with self-assurance and stability". This last assessment claims that the poems are "often celebrations of Collymore's deep affection for the sea and marine landscapes, the native West Indian's permanent vista".

So like an evergreen tree his urbane and likeable personality and his influence and personal authority over more than 30 years in the Caribbean entitled him to affection and respect and from these two positions, the poetry is perhaps not carefully read and regarded as traditional and a collector's piece. Edward Baugh for example makes the point "and we won't find in these poems (*The Selected Poems* 1959) any pre-occupation with the theme of West Indianism or with the peculiarities and problems of West Indian history ... or national feeling or sociological interest".

As the West Indies passes on its way through these decades of the 70's and 80's and poises itself for the 90's and the post 2000 era and as these pre-occupations with history and sociology and politics and economics which overlay the major literary issues are satisfied more and more, it will be the distinctively human aspects of life which will continue to command the attention of critics and pleasure-loving readers, and it is likely that discerning persons will have to go back and re-evaluate the established body of the self-perceptions of many West Indian writers which they inherit. These new readers will have to organise the tradition that is being set out in this period of search for cultural identity and will place in a new regional poetical order the body of its poetry, judging the items as dateless and/or undated by non-poetic considerations. And to my mind, in this new perspective many of Colly's poems will last for a very long time.

The Collymore poems were nearly all written in the 1940's, when he was in his fifties. Thinking about this and reflecting on the possible reasons for this

sudden and brief flowering of poetic expression, I recall that in that decade Colly must have enjoyed the intellectual and artistic companionship of his compatriot and fellow poet H.A. Vaughan and two other men who happened to be living and working in Barbados. One was Bryan King, British Council Representative and Senior Fellow at Pembroke College, Cambridge, and the other was Howard Hayden, Director of Education, whose encouragement, assistance and criticism Colly singles out for special thanks in the book *Beneath the Casuarinas*. I never met Howard Hayden, but I met Bryan King in Cambridge in 1946 and was greatly impressed by his easy and urbane conversation which encouraged others to give deeply of themselves. He was himself from St. Kitts, he said, and had enjoyed his years as British Council Representative in Barbados in the 1940's. From what H.A. Vaughan tells me about the penetrating personality of Howard Hayden, it must have been a remarkable conjunction of personalities, when those four minds discussed literature, philosophy and cultural issues in an island forum and one of the valuable results will have been the poetry which Frank Collymore produced.

Of course, as a teacher for decades, Colly must have had his mind full of the great themes of literature in the English language and his familiarity would express itself in ready and apt quotation, linking authors and poems in illuminating manner practised over the years. I would think, also, that at his age of 50 many doubts would have been laid to rest within his psyche and he would have placed many of the issues of life into a final order of priorities, relating to his life, his reading, his native island of Barbados, and his friends.

So as the doors of his creativity swung open, and he realised that the long pent-up fountains of his poetry were asserting themselves, he would have experienced a great pleasure as his pen revealed to his own startled mind its treasures during these years. The poems may have come fairly complete and full-panoplied from his mind and I daresay that many of them may have been sparsely revised, if at all, as he listened eagerly for their brothers and sisters to follow. It would be part of his personality, also, if rather shyly he showed some of them to a few chosen friends and if he seemed reluctant to have them see the light of day in print.

First of all, Collymore will be remembered as the poet of the Sea, and I set out below my favourite poem:

Hymn to the Sea

Like all who live on small islands
I must always be remembering the sea
Being always cognizant of her presence; viewing
Her thro apertures in the foliage; hearing
When the wind is from the south, her music, and smelling
The warm rankness of her; tasting
And feeling her kisses on bright sun-bathed days,
I must always be remembering the sea.

Always, always, the encircling sea
Eternal: lazy-lapping, criss-crossed with stillness
Or windruffed, aglitter with gold; and the surf
Waist-high for children, or horses for Titans.
Her lullaby, her singing, her moaning; on sand,
On shingle, on breakwater, and on rock;
By sunlight, starlight, moonlight, darkness,
I must always be remembering the sea.

Go down to the sea upon this random day
By metalled road, by sandway, by rockpath
And come to her. Upon the polished jetsam,
Shell and stone and weed, and salt-fruit
Torn from the underwater continents, cast
Your garments and despondencies; re-enter
Her embracing womb: a return, a completion.
I must always be remembering the sea.

Life came from the sea, and once a goddess arose
Full-grown from the salt deep; love
Flows from the sea, a flood; and the food
Of islanders is reaped from the sea's harvest;
Not only life and sustenance; visions too,
Are born of the sea: the patterning of her rhythm
Finds echoes within the musing mind.
I must always be remembering the sea.

Symbol of fruitfulness, symbol of barrenness
Mother and destroyer, the calm and the storm,
Life and desire and dreams and death
Are born of the sea; this swarming land
Her creation, her signature set upon the salt ooze
To blossom into life; and the red hibiscus
And the red roofs burn more brightly against her blue.
I must always be remembering the sea.

I've set out the poem in it entirely because I consider "Hymn to the Sea" to be one of the contemporary classics in Caribbean poetry. It is a classic because more than any other poem it captures the special reverential feeling of the surrounding sea for an islander. There is a joy in remembering the sea. The first stanza of the Hymn obediently describes the human sense of sight, smelling, hearing and tasting in action on the sea as so many gateways of pleasure. In the second stanza, "always", the adverb, introduces the physical dimension of inescapably encountering the sea in its glorious apperceptions. In one line, the

poet moves over the spectrum of sight from sunlight to darkness. Many memorable images of the sea are here—the surf “horses for Titans or waist-high for children”, “lazy lapping or windruffed, aglitter with gold”, (We could respell the word “wind-roughed”, if we wished). It is in the third stanza that we are invited to remove from our objective viewpoint and become involved physically in the sea. We come upon the sea by many paths; we meet the sea’s treasure trove, the goods lost by shipwreck or thrown overboard and found floating in the sea, and the poet adds things “torn from the underwater continents”. As he brings these up to full consciousness, he reverses the action of expressing them from the deep, and invites the reader to re-enter the sea’s embracing womb in “a return, a completion”. The full value of “return” comes in the fourth stanza. Since life came from the sea, in the drama of Darwinian evolution, re-entry is a means of casting “our despondencies” within the womb.

This fourth stanza is a recall of the interdisciplinary study of aesthetics and economics. “The Sea’s Harvest” is the food of islanders. But the poet touches upon “visions born of the sea” such as the ten-year voyage of Ulysses back to Penelope, or like Keats’ fine line of “eternal whisperings around desolate shores”. The poet also finds echoes of the rhythm’s pattern in his musing mind, and we may look at some of these echoes later on.

In the fifth stanza we are reminded of the dual nature of the sea—mother and destroyer, calm and storm, fruitfulness and barrenness. The poet summarises the argument with the lines:

Life and desire and dreams and death
Are born of the sea.

Then the thought rises in an inspired vein with the memory that Barbados is a marl-creation, “its swarming land is a veritable creation of the sea” ... “her signature set on the salt ooze to blossom into life”.

So the last two stanzas have moved away from the physical into the mentally important concepts, but the end of the fifth stanza returns to the physical image of contrast between the red roofs of houses and the red hibiscus as “burning more brightly against the blue of the sea”.

The reader will notice how the refrain “I must always be remembering the sea” holds the stanzas together and unifies the poem. Where does the poet remember the sea? where best? while still in the island? or when absent from Barbados?

I asked myself. Does this reverential and hymnary approach apply only to Barbados, with its special trick of white reflecting marl and rejoicing in a light which other islands may lack? Maybe Grenada qualifies, perhaps Saint Lucia, but what of the other islands?

So there is a multiplicity of underlying unitary correspondences in this poem, some sensuous, some philosophical, some carefully structured, some casually descriptive in the dense gravity of the stanzas. We leave the senses and point to the memory and the spirit in an illumination of imagery. The rhythm

is polyphonous with the varying complexity of the verse paragraphs completed by the refrain of remembering.

One attractive feature of the poem is the way in which the first and other stanzas the end of a line introduces the new thought for the next line, luring the attention on and so stitching the whole together. As the poem progresses, it assumes more and more the aspect of unified verse paragraphs with dense and direct statements.

The fourth stanza particularly is a nest of insights and a fine informed reaction to nature.

Flotsam, the second book of poems, represents an extraordinary stride forward on the quality of the first collection, with gains in range, weight and authority, but it is especially remarkable for the many references to the sea as a theme in addition to the "Hymn to the Sea". "Schooner", for example, speaks from a standpoint of being in a ship at sea at night and with runaway water under the stars. We see how the ship's prow "drips with the kiss of the wave". The poet selects the cigarette's glow to light the helmsman's face, "old as stone", but this soon shrinks into nothingness. And the voyage becomes a "Fugue of forgetting, while stars rush silently in swooping curves, and the night is hooped around the sea's endlessness" ... The sail's saga is told in slow syllables ... moments glide from darkness into darkness ... no meaning here but the song of the sails ... "And across the waters strides the wind to lay its reckless head upon the bosom of night".

So "Schooner" shares with "Hymn to the Sea" the basis of Colly's marine insights.

In another poem we learn that "words are the poem / the incalculable flotsam / that which bore them vanished beneath / the hurrying drift of time. ... peer below the restless surface discerning / tangled among the seaweed and obscured / A shape that might have been a man?"

Studded among the poems we come upon so many images which the sea has begotten upon the poet's memory, e.g. "the seal of the salt kiss is set already upon the gimcrack bungalows on the hillside"—"upon you falls the sound of the sea"—"the long deliberate curve of the bay"—"naked girls still breastless, mahogany and ebony, run shouting and laughing, their bodies etched in sun bright darkness along the glittering sand". I want to pause here since this image of the young pre-nubile girls is a very powerful one as they run along the beach against the sun. "On your ear beats the long murmur of the wave, else silence"—"the beck and sway of underwater forests thro the deep archways of tides"—"salvaged from all the surging flotsam of the years".

In the book *Thirty Poems*, we can trace here and there the similarity of Colly's preoccupation with the sea. For example in "Treasure Trove", he catches the sight of the evening sun—"Late afternoon and along / the beach from the bath returning / we must shield our dazzled eyes / from the sun's last burning / Farewell". But suddenly a wandering sunray is caught by the ravelled weed and "lo, a miracle is wrought".

The mass glows, each tiny
Petal with gold is crowned;
Burning fringed with light
Buried treasure found—
We pause, breathless
And gaze.

In the poem "Return", there are glimpses of images which will be seen more fully developed in "Hymn to the Sea". In the first stanza, the poet affirms "We too shall come down to the Sea", past the gay gardens, past the lichened pathway, down to the sands where "the shattered bones of leviathan are strewn with coral splinters". The second stanza has the same opening line but the poet lays emphasis here on his hearing "the ancient memory ... persistent, the song of the sea-shell". In the third stanza, he speaks of the return to "her dark embrace, back to our mother, the sea / the crowding sea, vomiting her living and her dead".

"Farewell to the Islands" notes, I believe, the two islands that his wife Ellice knew and loved—her native Dominica (with "woods and hills, and little rivers hurrying down the hills"), and Barbados, the island of her marriage, with "coral beaches, and about them curled, the maker and the mother of islands, the Sea". And, very finely, Colly tells his wife of the things "forming the little island that is herself".

In "Beneath the Casuarinas" there are other attractive sea-images. For example in "Seaplunge" the poet describes something one often sees—the "unharnessed plunge caressed / by lunging tide along sunrise" / (notice the internal music) "of leaping flecks and foam / and little flanks slide smooth / beneath whirling bubble-wreath / lost in coolness glide / and curl slow-swirling soothe / there under clear sea-glass / until all too soon surfaced, soon rippling / back to blue air and stippled sunlight".

This is a lovely sustained description of the under-water swimmer, moving smoothly along from the plunge and coming up for air.

In another poem, "Because I have turned my Back". Filled with regret and lost hope, the poet writes "My heart turns traitor, spurns / these hands, these eyes; yearns / to go back / drift with the long sweep of the wave / into the deep".

In another place debating what he should write a poem about, the poet meditates and having rejected the theme of trees and roots, he thinks of the sea—

And of the sea: seaspray and salt wind,
Seaweed and salt smell, and always
Foam-fringe and wave thrust, the sea-sound
Weaving the endless pattern, holding
Behind the tapestry of sound, the silence.

I've selected what appears to me the major references to the poetry of the sea that we find in the pages of Frank Collymore. To my mind, this is the unforgettable Colly, the poet of the sea, and I can find no one challenging his claim to this title.

them. One is his wife whom he had cast aside; the second was his mistress, but he could never be faithful to her. The third he had promised marriage but he had left her. The fourth woman had given him her love. "That was all. I am glad".

The first three women turn round on her when she says these words, "who are you woman to speak thus"? and they berate her and spurn her talk of memories. "What are memories? they are shadows". The wife and the mistress are thinking of the future ... of "the long years—the creeping loneliness of age". The third woman says "he has betrayed us". But the fourth in a moving passage tells them "you mistake love's meaning". "... this man was the way / to that bright garden whose living memory / Lightens my life. I have no more to say".

Readers will possibly re-read this poem to be sure they agree with what is the intention of the poet, and not all will do so. We are reminded that Colly is also a writer of short-stories, and actor in plays, and that each of the four feminine characters is clearly etched in the few lines spoken in the poem. The use of rhyme heightens the effect of the individual poem. Certainly the poem is worthy of close study, and I find myself asking "Are these Barbadian women characters, or universal types"?

Like many other poets, Colly pays a special tribute to his father and his mother. "In Thankfulness", one of the early poems, recalls a moment, when to the poet, sitting in the dusk, lulled by a fragment of a poem and reminded by a secret breeze, suddenly a vision comes of his father smiling, of his mother and of a dear dead friend, ... "The album of the past lies open, and in this moment is that other life renewed". The poet, overwhelmed by "this sweet visitation from the far-forgotten embalmed past, ... mocking the chains of time", is moved to ask for pardon for "the churliness of resentment", and is grateful for the precious gift of bliss, a benediction, too, too undeserved".

In the third book of poems, Colly has a double-page spread, two poems facing one another. "Birthday" to his mother and "Obituary" to his father. He compares birth and death, his birth fifty years before and the death of his father.

"Birthday" expresses a bouquet of tenderness and thanks. "You had borne a son; proud of your achievement; for then you were nearly as old as I am now", he says. The poem speaks of the profusion of the mother's love over the years unreturned by the thoughtless boy, seeking other "toys than those your dear affection might provide". Then the poem passes on to later years, when the son had grown up, and the mother had become herself "like a little care-free child" and she lay in her son's arms, "oblivious of his presence ... your life had come full circle, and in the growing circle of the moon you found a joy and happiness that moved your thoughts to laughter while mine in old regrets and tears were drowned".

And as he holds his aged mother in his arms, caught up "in the growing circle of the moon", the poet says "I thank you for your birthday gift, my life: your love entire".

"Obituary" depicts his father as a proper Barbadian gentleman, Custom's Officer, courteous, always with his pipe in his mouth, Church-going, frock-coated, top-hatted, cigar on Sundays, playing music by ear, sympathetic to a

REVIEW

SHANTI by ARNOLD ITWARU

Peepal Tree Press, U.K.

by Stephanos Stephanides

In the last few years we have seen in print a series of works from Guyanese writers with a rural East Indian background. While the cultural expression of these communities enjoys great vitality, for reasons of tradition it has only recently found its expression in literary form.

Among these new works, *Shanti*, by Arnold Itwaru, no doubt will prove to be a significant contribution to Guyanese and West Indian literature. Before *Shanti*, Itwaru, who teaches sociology at York University, Toronto, had published two volumes of poetry and a book of essays on social theory. Perhaps it is the combination of the poet and sociologist that gives Itwaru's first novel artistic maturity and social insight.

Itwaru's arresting narrative carefully intertwines the inner life of his characters with their social reality. In his depiction of the complex relationship between inner and outer life, the symbolic and referential aspects of language almost always go hand in hand in the narrative, giving it a poetic quality and intensity. However, unlike many novels that are called "poetic," the events of the tale are never lost sight of, nor are the symbols and metaphors removed from the environment and culture where the story is set. Itwaru probes and explores the constrictions and pressures of a particular social reality and community, and the human being's plight within it. He points to the dangers, means of escape, and possibilities of spiritual resistance and growth. In Itwaru's artistic quest, the physical environment is both representational and symbolic in that its meaning is intrinsic to its significance in a person's inner life, and at the same time is identifiable with a specific landscape and environment. His style brings together naturalistic and symbolic modes of realism. This is evinced in the opening passage when we see the protagonist, Shanti, in her new home in a northern industrial country (perhaps Canada), where she has emigrated to escape the oppression and poverty of her community in Guyana:

In the villages of her life doors were closed when no one was at home, when someone died, and at night. Wooden, open to the sun, the wind, the neighbours, friends, relatives—even the mosquitoes and sandflies when they were in season—life inside embraced life outside. But here this side of her long flight from all she had loved and hated, here doors were always closed, always wall to wall of unfamiliarities. (pp. 5 and 6)

This ambivalent beginning is not resolved in the unfolding of Shanti's story, as the rest of the novel tells us of her life in retrospect and leads to the final sentence "And Shanti"?, which in turn leads us back to the beginning. This cyclical structure, however, does not mean a closed reality. The non-resolution

is an indication that the end of the novelistic quest (that of the heroine) has not been reached by the flight to an improved material reality. Nonetheless, the need to escape from the material hardship of her legacy has also been significant. Shanti recalls her mother's words: "You mus learn, me daughta. Learn. Dis nah life fi yuh. Dis nah life, me tell yuh". But beyond this escape, there is a struggle for integrity and dignity. In his novel, Itwaru pays homage to this tremulous struggle within the vicissitudes of a harsh reality.

This is conveyed partly by the unfolding of the events of the story itself and partly by beautiful descriptive passages such as the following that contain naturalistic details of everyday life with exactness of sensorial perception, and a symbolism that has religious connotations arising from within the life of the community described:

Bathing here was a precarious ritual of balancing on the crude unsteady board beneath her while she washed surrounded by the stench of effluvium, cleaning herself with the buckets of water she had drawn from the roadside standpipe half a mile away, washing once, often twice daily, in defiance of that which seemed to insist on uncleaning her, on undoing the very meaning of her self-cleansing. (p. 41)

While the novel is primarily a celebration of the spirit of Shanti, who even though oppressed, impoverished, and humiliated, is never totally crushed and degraded by her social reality, it also points to the dangers and injustices of those social constraints that give rise to deep-seated social and racial tensions and hatreds leading to rape, murder, and suicide, and which are described with macabre and gruesome realism. These destructive energies are primarily embodied in three negative social and racial stereotypes: the overpowering white overseer, Booker; the mean-spirited and miserly banya, the East Indian shopkeeper Kisson; and the bullying and sycophantic Black policeman Reid. Perhaps it is the macabre elements (and the intensity of style) that has led some readers to compare Itwaru's writing to that of the Trinidadian Sonny Ladoo. There is however an essential difference of vision. Ladoo describes a closed reality that arouses horror, pity, and despair. It has elements of the surreal, the absurd, and touches of black humor that degrade rather than dignify. On the other hand, Itwaru's novel (albeit a modern novel in its conception of language and structure) embraces a more classical view of human reality. Destructive energies are countered by protest, lament, and most important, compassion.

Shanti's struggle for integrity is dramatized in her conflict with the anglicized (and also sycophantic) East Indian headmaster, who personifies the imposition of foreign values. This sharply satirized figure bullies the community with the colonial and Christian values he has adopted (the setting of the novel seems to be near the end of the colonial period). The headmaster, as a representative of the educational system, is Shanti's means of development and escape from her poverty. He becomes her patron but then rejects her (despite her success in the teacher's exam) because of her independent and "uncooperative"

attitude, and expresses his contempt for her and her people: "this madness which kept them in their mud huts and hovels, this ancestral evil they reenacted in their barbaric Kali Mai Pujah" (p.88).

It is interesting that in Itwaru's novel, the woman and not the man is depicted as being the resilient force in the community's struggle for integrity and the vital center for the community's identity. (Apart from Shanti we find positive portrayals of female characters in Rosa, the East Indian woman in the rice-cutting gang, and Gertrude, the Black friend of Shanti's mother). Latchman, Shanti's husband to be, becomes subservient to foreign values for the sake of social and professional success. Nonetheless, after betraying Shanti, he later shows his commitment to her and thus is redeemed through her. While analyzing the male/female relationship for its parabolic significance, it is interesting to compare it to Harris's "East Indian novel," *The Far Journey of Oudin*. Here Oudin, through his compassion, saves Beti from Ram. Beti plays a passive role, even though she has special significance in that she devours the contract (which she does not understand) and thus the negative legacy represented in the Oudin-Ram relationship. One of Harris's concerns is to create a form of fiction embodying the possibility of change within the community. Thus he also undermines the closed reality of an earlier form of fiction that serves to reinforce the negative legacy of that community. For example, the change in Ram undermines the stereotype of the "miserly coolie" Ramgolall in Mittelholzer's *Corentyne Thunder*, and Oudin's commitment to Beti vindicates Geoffrey's betrayal of Kattie. However, even though Harris's novel has linguistic, symbolic, and socio-political allusions that place it in a particular time and environment (a Guyanese East Indian rural community during the 1950's), the sensibility and inner life of the community never comes alive. Harris's novel grows more out of the parabolic significance that he has conceived rather than a closeness to the community he describes. This is not to underestimate Harris's achievement. Itwaru is a great admirer of Harris and he has learned from him. There are some echoes of Harris's prose style in Itwaru and, more important, we find a similar dialectic between creative and destructive forces that is a hallmark of Harris's oeuvre. But Itwaru has a visceral understanding of the community he depicts that is lacking in Harris. While Harris's novel is an important transitional novel in that it points the way to a new kind of fiction that may serve as an integrating force in the life of a fragmented community, Itwaru's is far more effective as a retriever vehicle for the creative and vital energies of this particular community, because his work is more purifying in the honesty and directness with which he deals with his subject matter.

It is perhaps because of this visceral understanding that Itwaru has chosen a female protagonist. While in western eyes the Indian woman is often seen as passive, within a Hindu community the woman (particularly in her role as mother) is the sanctuary and protector of all that is sacred and intimate to oneself. Itwaru was brought up a Lutheran but, having grown up in Canje, he participated in and experienced the vitality of Hindu popular and religious culture. Shanti's strength, her intimacy with her inner self, is sometimes ex-

pressed through Hindu rituals and symbols as was previously observed in the bathing scene. Another notable example is a description of one dark Diwali night. Shanti does not understand the relevance of Ram's kingdom to the people in her village but her feelings respond to the internal meaning of the ritual. There is a note of protest in Shanti's thoughts, yet here is also family intimacy and arousal of joy, which (like many other parts of the novel) is evoked with intense lyricism:

It was preposterous that Ram was god here where her father and mother worked from dawn to the dusk of their day without his aid or presence. (p. 82)

This night of illumined undarkening, cooled in the breezes of a sea oceaned in the tides of another moment of mother and daughter and father ritualized in cleansings in the soiled toiling of their existence. The mother began to hum the melody and text of an old and mysterious mantra whose ununderstood presence brought in the child an arousal of joy. The *chamaylee* filled the moment in its odorous nocturne of dewy fragrance and the mango tree murmured in the tremor of *deeya* light this dark Diwali night. (p. 82)

We find the same ambivalence when Itwaru examines issues of identity. It is an ambivalence that arises from the very human tension between an attempt to find dignity and feelings of shame in a social reality where human sensibilities have been demeaned. Cultural and social identification center the individual in his community. Failure to identify leads to ineffectiveness. Let us examine the following two passages:

Shanti did not know India. But this was of little consequence. Their ancestors were born in India. Civilizations and dim centuries had intervened since then, but they were nonetheless Indian. They held on to this, for in it there was at least some dignity. But for Shanti named after and within the OM, indivisible syllable of the self in tranquillity, the speech of peace, Shanti, peace, daughter of peace—there was shame. Shame wore her in the tattered dresses of her childhood—(p. 6)

Shanti did not dream of India. She wished she were invisible. It seemed the only way. It was easier to be alone, not looked at, not seen, hidden. Shanti did not dream of India. (p. 7)

The end of the novelistic quest (and Shanti's quest as is implied in her name) is the human quest for union with the self in tranquillity. Itwaru's recounting of the quest reveals deep compassion for the pain and a voice of protest for the injustice.

**REVIEW BETWEEN THE DASH AND THE COMMA
and DEMERARY TELEPATHY by Sasenarine Persaud
by Karen Swenson**

The wire between the positive of love and the negative of racism is the tightrope that Sasenarine Persaud walks in his poetry. To continue the metaphor, the pole he uses to balance between these extremes in his books, *Between the Dash and the Comma* and *Demerary Telepathy*, is composed of the cultures he has allegiances to—the East Indian, South American and Canadian.

Although at times Persaud uses the pole to beat the reader, at least as often his composite of allegiances informs and enriches the lyricism of his work as in a stanza from "The End of Summer II":

Today everything is still
As the Yogi in Samadhi
Still and full as the realized soul
Of the Buddha stand maples
Yellowing on slopes on fringes
Of statues green willows
Weeping on KAMDEO'S brow

A little punctuation would help the reader appreciate more fully the fine rhythmic flow of this passage with its lovely hesitations, like caught breaths, caused by the repetitions of "still" and "on" and the liquid spill of 1 sounds. Mixed in with a strong ancestral sense of Indian heritage is a frequent physical longing for the Southern reaches of the continent:

Tons of milky sand
Rising up hills—swaying down
Valleys of untouched timber—
Acres and acres of fertile rainforest

with their overwhelming plentitude. The cold of Canada is perceived as both beautiful and violent, a reflection of an unfriendly culture, indifferent to, sometimes hostile in its reaction to the writer:

Airport inspectors' sullen stares
And wintry immigration queries

Canada is white in its snow but also in its racist attitudes which whether in Canada, England, South Africa or the U.S. are the focus of many of the poems in both books. Poems of protest inevitably start with several strikes against them since they are apt to sound either hectoring or lecturing. While the ideas in such poems as "Sir (Shri) Naipaul", "Ode to Palestine", "The New Ruler" or "The Award Ceremony" are acceptable to anyone except the most ardent right

winger who is unlikely to read these books, often the poems deteriorate into lists:

When it is not fashionable to hear
"Unaggressive Asians"—
Jews, "whites" and Negroes—
Bellow, Singer, Brodsky
Sakharov, Achebe, Ceasaire-Tutu—
or:
Hoyte always a backer of Burnham
Green more racist than Botha
Corbin a Rapist of Indian
Importers' daughters....

Neither litany communicates the emotions Persaud is trying to unleash, and the poems turn into a newspaper column with the life expectancy of a daily tabloid, since in twenty years few but historians are likely to recognize these names, while the horror and inhumanity of racism will still be with us. The names focus us on the people rather than the evil. One personal incident is worth a thousand headlines. "Look O Stranger! (Letter to Toronto)" is much more appealing and grabs the reader emotionally more than the poems referred to above just because it is full of chip-on-the-shoulder personal rage:

The hang I care!
I haven't come to steal your land
I haven't come to hide my dignity in flurries
Or disgust in dead legality!

I come to learn to love
Your pornographic world
And smoke-filled strip joint of paid pretense.
Clean streets and cold air.
I come to take sound autumnal manners
To my shattered slavery.

I will forget teenagers tongueing
On sofas in college corners....

These are swaggeringly fiesty lines and while one may not be sure of the meaning of certain phrases—"disgust in dead legality!" or "autumnal manners"—one feels the presence of a real human rather than an official recorder. The reader receives a series of precise snapshots instead of vague events and can sympathise with another's cultural reaction to the contrast between the "clean streets" and the teenagers' public kissing.

The second focus of these two books is love and it is here that Persaud reaches into his cultural mixed bag and comes up with some of his more beautiful images. Here, as an example, is "In the Garden" in its entirety:

Dearest, I've not killed Ravan
So we cannot go home.

Has Hanuman deserted me,
And Lanka smokes in my head?

A satellite who would be
A star before its energy's
Burned up in illusion,
Records
Lumbering Canadian seagulls bombing the ground
Around rundown highrises
For refuse of poesy...

Forgive me, dearest, for having found
Ravan so late.
How he laughs at me
And how my fingers shake,
How unsteady my aim! How many heads
Has he! And is it the one
That bears my face...?

The weaving of the *Ramayana* into and around the Canadian urban landscape achieves easily what Persaud's political poetry strains for, i.e. a powerful sense of the disparity between the writer and his environment and achieves it without any sense of bombast. The last lines are truly humble and courageous in their recognition that the self is in the enemy and the enemy is in the self. In *Demerary Telepathy* there is a series of poems called "Visit" which revisits a luxuriant rural landscape filled with echoes of East Indian customs. These poems project a sense of peace, of belonging to the land and its creatures in such a way that men and women belong easily to each other:

From this remote country-house
Relatives, friends, guests and I
See two unmarried smiles melt into
Each other and illuminate
The night

As the women head back from time
With dancing lamps
We all see
Fingers of our lost flame of innocence.

As is the case in other poems, I am not sure of the meaning of "the women head back from time" but the two smiles melting into one, the "dancing lamps" turning into the "flame of innocence" are highly emotionally charged images which allow a reader from whatever culture entrance into the universal experiences of love and regret.

In Memoriam

AJS

1914—1989

MEMOIR

by Wilson Harris

A.J. Seymour was a man of deep convictions. This may not have been obvious at first sight because of his urbanity and effortless scholarship. Books constituted a series of essential milestones in his life and his private library in Georgetown—which I had the pleasure of visiting on one or two occasions—may well have been the finest to be assembled by anyone in Guyana. Books were for him I believe a treasury of magic and caveat that bore some parallel I think to the lost initiations that some so-called savage tribes instituted as guide-lines into maturity.

He admired Alfred North Whitehead from whom he drew it seems the philosophic principle of “persuasion” and adapted this as an initiation into cultural politics.

At any rate that was my impression. We spoke of this a long time ago; in the late 1940s I think it was. The conversation drifts back now like a body in a state of dispersal: a cloud, so to speak, cloud-politics, cloud-parliament, cloud-church. (A well-known poem of his was entitled CLOUDS OVER GUIANA).

The fact is that “persuasion” in its philosophic cement—I hope I am doing justice to the distant echoes of his thought then so long ago—may well be the articulate gesture of manifestoes and propaganda, ideologies and causes that are presented and advocated by various parties.

On the face of it this is obvious but the dangers of “persuasion” in their bearing on authoritarian pressures to conform to a political or intellectual or religious theory tend to be overlooked. Equally the subtlety of “persuasion” as a mathematic of virtue, as a dispassionate concern with the truth, as a necessity to promote a tested understanding of the truth, remains obscure.

“Persuasion” in its dangers and in its inevitability—in the senses in which we have been using the word—may require an instinct in the scholar or poet or scientist in testing varieties of precipitation from legacies of tradition.

In my view Seymour possessed that instinct in a remarkable degree. It may have sustained him I think when he was under pressure or in times of adversity within the variable cultural and economic frames of the region when he needed to keep a cool head and sensitive mind.

I remember albeit vaguely attempting to argue with him that “dialogue”—however unwelcome it was to a society that was beginning to take its cue from convinced ideologies—was a threshold beyond the cement of embattled creeds into a dimension of the imagination that could re-interpret or transform—in some real degree—the oscillation within a pendulum that swung from authoritarian pressure, on one hand, to protestations on behalf of the good life on the other. Something of the sort anyway came into our conversation.

My recollection is that I raised the difficult reality of “dialogue” because of a series of poems I had been writing during a long stay in the Cuyuni River

(one of the most fascinating and dangerous rivers in the Guianas) which I had abandoned in favour of a kind of epic. This too had been cast aside. I remember feeling it had not however been wasted when I came upon—in a bookshop in Church Street—some essays by Martin Buber.

Buberian “dialogue” encompassed the silent eloquence of a “stone” because of its peculiar “address” in a peculiar landscape. This concept was native to me as someone in a state of immersion in the unpredictable watersheds, riverscapes, landscapes of Guyana, in maps, topographies, contours, rocks etc. etc. This was something to which Seymour responded. His father had been a land surveyor. But at the time when he and I spoke I had a long way to go to translate elusive figures in their peculiar “address” into a correlation or association of imageries within a field of experience that begins to tilt, to move, to change, to dislodge its and one’s pre-possession into unexpected relationships and global angles of vision...

Needless to say it is not my intention to pursue this and I mention it only because in the late 1940s I was at a disadvantage in speaking of a field or a map or horizons etc. etc. of “dialogue”. Seymour was in a far stronger position than I. He seemed to have no qualms about a tradition of “persuasion”. He was closer to the popular mood. Except that, in his advocacy (say) of the idea of a West Indian Federation, he was never an absolutist. Indeed he drew upon innate resources of tolerance. That blend of “persuasion” and “tolerance” was to make him increasingly vulnerable as the years passed and subject to unpleasant abuse or denigration of his achievement by so-called radicals. I witnessed this myself on one or two occasions but have no desire to elaborate. Suffice it to say that one should be aware of such currents in the body politic. It is so easy to impose glossy eulogies on the dead and to bury the truth as much as the man or the woman.

Was it a losing battle that he fought? He would, I am sure, say No. Nevertheless his hopes for a West Indian Federation were to be dashed. It is obvious that the goal of Federation signified to him much more than a political objective. It was for him I think a gateway into a far-flung regional imagination that would respect individual territories but breach parochial or provincial cliques. We need to perceive the strengths and weaknesses of *Kyk-over-Al* within such an arena of conflicting interests. It comes as no surprise perhaps that *Kyk-over-Al* ceased and closed its literary doors when Federation became a mirage.

We need however to hazard some guesses as to the complex circumstances within and beyond what I have already said that bore on the demise of *Kyk-over-Al*. As Federation receded the newly Independent States of the Caribbean began to emerge (Guyana on the South American continent became independent in the middle 1960s). Such status or sovereignty evoked enthusiasm and euphoria except that the shadow of mirage or malaise, in the receding tide of Federation, may have been still pertinent as a caveat of illusory power. In what degree, one may ask, did Independence for many small or poorly inhabited large territories in the modern world, become a signal of the decomposition of real power, real decision, as old Empires dissolved? Empires sustain, however

perversely or drastically, the scope for real power, they are practised in habits of cultural decision for better or worse. When they go their former estates (now apparently independent) require extraordinary insight and genius in the creation of new associations and collaborations within the flux of continental and island destinies. New literary journals in the Caribbean need I think to understand this in giving a medium to the life of complex imagination or else they will become pawns—perhaps unwitting pawns—of nihilistic sophistication and cliché or platitude.

I doubt whether any Caribbean journal in the 1960s would have possessed the rare nerve or opportunity to seek to illumine links between Independence so-called and the decomposition of real power. It is a paradox that such a tension between age-old sovereignty and the decomposition of cultural decision could have been uplifted I believe into the quantum seed of an extraordinary breakthrough into the cross-cultural fabric of a civilisation (especially when one bears in mind the so-called 'melting-pot' of the Central and South Americas). But it was not to be. The euphoria of the late 1950s/1960s decade led to rigidities and violence and a constriction of horizons.

I never resumed with Seymour the thread of the discussion we had had in the late 1940s. Not even in 1959 when a week or so before my leaving British Guiana (as it then was) he turned up unexpectedly to wish me bon voyage. I had moved to the outskirts of Georgetown. There he was... picking his way along the uneven, badly-surfaced road that approached the sparsely-furnished barn of a house I temporarily occupied... There he was... His thick glasses glinted in the sun as he looked up. Greeting, farewell, fused into one moment.

The last time I saw him was in December 1987. I was in Georgetown for a few days. Perhaps he had achieved the sublimation of premises he entertained as a young man. Perhaps something more than sublimation pure and simple. An equation perhaps between involuntary darkness and unconscious light. **Sun's in my blood.** A line from one of his early poems. Had he proven in himself, tested in himself, the light of "persuasion" that may blind when it becomes a weapon in the hand of others?

I wanted to ask but did not. I ask now. For it is relevant to the pendulum of humanity and to the echoing voices of the past. Echoes of a tormented, however apparently sanguine, theatre of conscience that runs through all territories and philosophies of Imagination in the lived life.

TRIBUTE
by Eusi Kwayana

Dr Arthur J. Seymour, father of modern Guyanese literature, began a long sleep on December 25, 1989, when his eyelids shut out the life and nature which he loved. His chief mourner at home is the widow and his co-worker, Mrs Elma Seymour.

Cradled in an underrated and quietly defiant Georgetown middle class, which by then had chosen the Church as its social compass, Seymour went deeper and chose Jesus, its notional founder.

The early influences on his development as a poet seem to be English poetry and then poetry in the same language from various places. Later, with political events in his own country achieving more than customary size, the pulse of the nation as an aspiring community influenced him. Amerindian, African, Indian, he sang the ways of them with more or less familiarity. All of this had to be strained and refined by his religious conscience.

In one of his books is a poem, "For my sons and daughters". These lines from that poem are prophetic.

When death has knocked at my door
What can a poet hand down?
—The insights of his vision.

Death has knocked at his door. He hands down a rich legacy.

(First published in **OPEN WORD**, January 8, 1990)

A DEATH AT CHRISTMAS—LAST MEMORIES OF AJS

by Ian McDonald

At lunchtime on December 18, AJS phoned to ask me if I would be very kind and pass for him that afternoon to take him to the 1989 Guyana Prize Awards Ceremony at the Cultural Centre. The old man was always courteous. He took no favour asked for granted. I said of course I would be delighted.

The Guyana Prize Awards Ceremony was exactly the sort of event which he had been inspiring, encouraging, assisting, contributing to, sponsoring, god-fathering, and often single-handedly creating for his people for over 50 years. His distinction was solid and lasting as a greenheart tree. Growing and alive, it was beautiful. Even cut down it would last as long as forever ever lasts.

At the Cultural Centre I went on the platform with AJS and we sat next to each other waiting for the President to arrive and the Awards Ceremony to start. I told him the latest issue of *Kyk-Over-Al*, No. 40, badly delayed at the printers, was about to come out at last. He leaned over and pressed my arm. "That is wonderful. Ah, Ian, *Kyk*, what a time that was!" Forty-four years before, in 1945, he brought out *Kyk* No. 1 and for the next 16 years virtually alone he regularly edited and sometimes almost entirely wrote one of the two most important literary magazines in the West Indies, thus incalculably ministering to the region's cultural life, the region's artistic self-confidence, and even the region's political development.

The President was a little late. Before he arrived AJS turned again to me and asked a strange, sad question:

"Ian, do you think people still feel I serve any purpose"?

He was serious and intent. I was silent, what else could I be? Is this what the old age of our great men comes to, that it can ask such a sad and terrible question? Are we to blame, who come after? I searched desperately for some sort of reply:

"Arthur, you represent all that is the best in our lives". The words were wholly inadequate, but he seemed satisfied.

"Thank you. I am glad". He had that deep courtesy, the carefulness not to hurt others.

During the Awards Ceremony AJS sat stately, intent on the proceedings. Rex Nettleford gave his address: Seymour and Nettleford, matching stars in the West Indian firmament. Al Creighton gave the judges' report: excellence must rule. David Dewar, accompanied by the Police Force Band, sang "Salute to Guyana" and AJS leaned over and whispered "Lovely, lovely". The President presented the awards.

But as time went by I thought AJS began to look a little agitated. He looked through me once or twice as if watching something far, far away. When Martin Carter, a Prizewinner, came to read his great poem "Returning" AJS leaned forward, concentrating, then turned towards me:

“That is Martin Carter. I publish him in *Kyk*. He is the finest young poet”.

At the end of the Awards Ceremony AJS looked worried. As the President got up to leave AJS turned to me and said he had lost his purse. I said I did not think he had brought a purse. “I have lost my purse”. I asked him what was in the purse. “A few poems”. On the stage for a while I helped him look for the lost purse of poems but we did not find it. I went with him up the aisle towards the exit, holding his arm. His steps were slow. His face was serious. A gallant old gentleman, smart in his dark suit and well-tied bow-tie, he went slowly out of the Centre he had graced one last time.

In the car outside I offered to take him home, he looked so tired, but he wanted very strongly to go to the supper the Vice-Chancellor was giving in honour of the Guyana Prizewinners. I should have taken him home. On the way to the supper, in the car, I think now I know exactly when the killing stroke hit him. We were talking about Jacqueline de Weever, his much-loved niece in New York, and I had asked him what she was doing now. He began to reply, “She is teaching.....” and lost the thread suddenly and never again found it. I did not press him. He was tired and to be forgetful was his privilege. We shared the silence. At the Vice-Chancellor’s he had to be helped very slowly up the steep stairs.

It brings tears to my eyes to think how alone and puzzled and afraid he must have been at that dinner. People tried politely to keep him company, brought him drinks of red sorrel, helped him to food, talked to him comfortably. Some instinct, an ingrained bravery of spirit, kept him going. But his mind was awry, his eyes were lost. By the end of the evening he was in a state of collapse, his left leg crumpling, and three of us had to lift him down the stairs and carry him to the car. He is heavy, I thought. It was a dark night but the stars were piercing bright and it flashed in my mind to think how many lovely nights he had seen in his time and what poems he had made of them. All his life he had praised beauty.

Martin and Phyllis Carter came in the car with me to see him home. At 23 North Road, Martin—thank God for his burly strength—and I got AJS out of the car and to the door, which Elma anxiously opened for us, and up the stairs to the living room where we laid him down on a couch. He looked at us but his eyes were lost. Elma loosened his bow-tie and gently took off his jacket and his black-shone shoes and comforted him, that it would be all right. After a while we left. Elma thanked us for looking after AJS and bringing him home safe. The Seymours are courteous, proud people. As we went down the stairs she was talking quietly to him, comforting him, telling him it would be all right. After all she had cared for him for 52 years. Later I heard she hurt her shoulder lifting him. How could she have got him to his bed that night? She trusted God’s strength in her.

AJS was taken by ambulance to the Medical Arts Wednesday evening. The following day I visited him, bringing a copy of *Kyk-Over-AI* No. 40 which Gordon Forte had just brought for me from the Maranatha Press. AJS lay sleeping. I went up and called his name and he slowly and with hard effort

opened his eyes. "Arthur, it is Ian here". He nodded but could not speak. I showed him the new *Kyk* with one of Stephanie Correia's beautiful Paintings inscribed on the cover. I told him it was a beautiful issue. He could be proud of it. I made myself think he tried to smile. He closed his eyes again and gave a weary sigh. I sat a while and thought about him and his great life. John Updike had written "What a good use of life, to have created one beautiful book". And AJS had created scores of beautiful books. When I left I said "Goodbye Arthur" but he did not respond. I carried the copy of *Kyk* with me to give to Elma. He had told me long ago that he always gave the first copy of anything he published to her.

The last time I visited there was no recognition. I sat by his bed and called his name but there was nothing. He slept, his breathing laboured, his head wet with perspiration, an old, good man going to his death. I sat by him and held his hand for a long time. Sometimes there was life in his fingers and I looked to see if he would wake but he did not wake. I sat holding his hand with my memories of him until it was dark and I felt it was time to go. At first he had been like a father to me and later I had been like a son to him. I closed my eyes and dreamed and said a confused prayer. The best of his poetry would live forever. He must have known that. He was so many good things but most of all a poet. "Name Poem", "Over Guiana, Clouds", "Sun is a Shapely Fire", "The Legend of Kaieteur", "For Christopher Columbus", "There Runs a Dream", "Tomorrow Belongs to the People", "I Heard a Rooster Call". Though he dies, they are imperishable. But then, sitting with him for the last time, hand in his hand for his comfort and for mine, as the dark came outside, it was none of these great poems that came to me. On his 75th birthday, in a small gathering of family and friends, he had read a new poem to us lucid as sunlight, refreshing as the wind pouring through the windows of his Bourda home:

Bless Father God, I pray,
The gift of my birthday,
This milestone—I alive
At age of seventy-five.
Bless, Holy Spirit, bless
With Thine own holiness
All that I do and say
As from Thy will today
And Jesus Christ, Thy Son,
May all His Grace be done.

The clear, low voice of the great old man, the old poet, saying the simple, clear, shining lines had brought silence in the room then. Now, half-dreaming, hand in hand, beside the old man who could not any longer speak his clear and shining lines, I sensed the greatness of his spirit come near enough to touch and move me one last time as the greater silence gathered like a welcoming.

THE LEGEND OF ARTHUR JAMES SEYMOUR

by Mary Noel Menezes, RSM

My dear Elma and family, relatives and friends of AJ. Whatever position or office we hold, we are all here today as friends of AJ.

This afternoon it is my great privilege to pay tribute to my dear friend, AJ—but to pay a tribute to the most distinguished son of Guyana, “a most complete literary man”, a legend even in his own time, is to attempt an undertaking too vast for mere words. How can I hope to capture the indescribable wealth of his varied and immense outpouring of literary works, the largesse of his poetry? I can only revert to his own prophetic words in “Death of a Poet”:

He was a nation’s angel
Pointing the sword across the desert....

He contrived jewels
Out of the ore of the language
To become
Beloved attributes
And justify the people

He shaped the people’s visions
Eternally within themselves

For over 50 years—he was “a poetical child of the 1930s”—Arthur James Seymour has been shaping the vision of our people and those of the Caribbean. He has fashioned images of love, longing, birth, life, death, resurrection, time, sleep, memory, beauty, innocence, vision, justice, pain and suffering, of laughter and of ecstasy; he has illuminated the simple, everyday happenings of life; he has spoken, among so many other things, of shirtjacs and mangoes, of callaloo and wings. Under his pen, history has come alive—we listen to the roar of the Mighty Kaieteur, we hear music in “the breathe of names”; we catch glimpses of rivers flowing out to sea, and “clouds over Guiana”; we feel his love for the people of Guyana “who hold history in their hands”. In so many of his poems his love for Guyana is poured out. It is a great sadness really that our children have not been exposed to this poetry and caught the fire of his love.

What is closest to a man’s heart must be expressed meaningfully. An artiste expresses his feelings in painting, sculpture, dance, and poetry, to name but a few of the endless list of creativity. Even a cursory glance at the vast collection of AJ’s poetry will make one conscious of the fact that his love for God, bolstered by his love for people, ran like a shining thread throughout his works. He never forgot from whom his genius came; his was an unfailing gratitude to God, for

...His great gift of words
That shape to the occasion.

as he voiced in the words of "Psalm".

Through this gift he continuously discovered God's love, was in harmonious touch with His Creator, and "through images of grace sought to learn His face". True, he showed God's face in many guises in his poetry, but he showed the more intimate and passionate side to his beloved wife, Elma, with whom he shared one mind, one heart, and one soul, and also to his cherished sons and daughters and to all whose lives he touched so memorably. I recall that over the years my conversations with AJ on whatever subject, be it literature, art, history, religion, family life, were mini-meditations which always left me stimulated and inspired. For over 50 years AJ, a dedicated and sincere Christian, a man of deep faith, preached the good news to thousands of people in many parts of the country. A few years ago, together with Elma, he travelled as a pilgrim to the Holy Land which (may I quote his words) "led me to want to make a greater witness to the Lord through the gift of poetry He has given me". One of the results of that pilgrimage was that gem of a poem: "I heard a Rooster Call/ Through gold Jerusalem". In an article on "AJ's Religious Thought", Dr. Robert Moore rightly called AJ both a prophet and a poet, indicating that "the prophet is a person with a concentrated power of history in his being". This is an apt description of AJ for the true heart of our history throbs through his poetry and for this he can be hailed as prophet. As prophet, he has decried the ills of our generation, the violence, the lawlessness, the insolence of youth, the "callous erosion of our private rights" and insisted in his poem "Task":

There must be words to feed the hungry spirit
To shine the mirror of a living faith
To bless the anguished mind awake at midnight
To soothe the old and set the children singing
Make laughing lovers dream under the sky

What a legacy he has left us!

Thus we rightly mourn the passing of this prophetic, brilliant, and above all, caring and lovable gentleman. With him a cultural era has ended and we are the poorer for it. But, my friends, on this feast of St. Thomas A. Becket, may I refer to his sermon on Christmas morning, 1170, as given us by T.S. Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral*—"we can rejoice and mourn at once for the same reason". Yes, let our tears flow and cleanse the wound of sorrow but, above all, let us rejoice for the gift of God to us and to this country—the gift of Arthur James Seymour. How privileged we are to have been the recipients of such a wealth of creativity. How privileged I personally feel to have known him and to have been touched by his gentleness and his courtesy, as much as by his poetry! I would like to attribute these words of George Bernard Shaw to Arthur James Seymour:

Life is no brief candle to me
It is a sort of splendid torch
Which I have got hold of for the moment
And I want to make it burn as brightly as possible
Before handing it on to future generations

AJ's life and poetry were indeed splendid torches which he lit in the hearts of thousands. The greatest service, the greatest honour, the greatest memorial we can do and give to AJ is to pass on that torch to future generations of Guyanese.

A loving God welcomed AJ home on Christmas, His Son's birthday, where he is hearing the Christmas song now in God's sight. We may be sure that AJ has lost no time composing a poem, a poem of praise for the occasion, which must far outstrip in beauty and ecstasy his "Song of Christmas" written in the 1970s, and his Christmas Poem of only a few weeks ago. So how can we not REJOICE and CELEBRATE this most glorious time when, in the words of Isaiah, "he has gone out in joy and will be led forth in peace".

(Eulogy at the Funeral Service for Arthur James Seymour)

"A GOLDEN LEAF HAS FALLEN"

by Cleveland Hamilton

Death moves with its majestic sway and sweeps us to the deep
and underground...

A year ago about the same time it was that titan of the Guyana and Commonwealth Caribbean Bar and Judiciary, Joseph Oscar Fitzclarence Haynes, whose memory the Guyana Bar Association has just honoured with a special issue of its *Review*. Now it's the high priest of Guyanese and Commonwealth Caribbean literature, Arthur James Seymour. The deaths of the two giants, born within eighteen months of each other, occurred almost exactly a year apart. The golden leaves of autumn have been falling.

For some five and a half decades Arthur Seymour was the star that lit up the firmament of poetry in this country, and was the distinguished professional. A civil servant by occupation, he rose to the heights, firstly, in his own British Guiana, latterly Guyana, and then in the Caribbean. His career straddled and encompassed the colonial regime and regimen and even broadened out into the formative years of independence. The books in which he chronicled the gist and highlights of his experiences as a public servant at home and abroad, written in a style of elegance and selectivity, make a distinctive contribution to the history and literature of Guyana and the West Indies for all time. One regrets the absence even in an area of chronic pathological limitations of all sorts of similar efforts by men and women who had risen as Seymour did in his field of public performance. Of course, Seymour was blessed with both the talent and the inclination.

But whatever he did, earning a living, wherever he did it, it was his poetry that was both obsessive and possessive. With all of his achievements in the arena of public service, it was as a poet and literary critic that he was best and most popularly known. He was a professional both ways, an artist of ambidextrous proportions. His first collection of poems, *Verse*, was published in 1937 when he was a civil servant of twenty three. "Caligula" with its exotic, Roman flavour stood out—"Slow I strolled home /To where my towering palace frowns on Rome"—the poetic capacity was evident, but in more ways than one there was a certain tentativeness about the collection. In the succeeding years, despite the constraints, there were more collections written with greater certitude and originality and, more importantly, distinctly indigenous. Seymour ultimately became the grand master of the Guyanese connexion, the finest singer of the Guyanese song. He immortalised Kaieteur and Kamakusa and Kyk-over-al. His "Legend of Kaieteur", translated into music by another Guyanese virtuoso, Philip Pilgrim, who predeceased Seymour by forty-five years, was written in his late twenties.

There were surprises for me when I first met him in the middle years of the Second World War. What did I expect a real live poet to look like? A poet in the office of the Commissioner of Income Tax? He was soft, shy, patient, the epitome of modesty as he proffered a poetic opinion and generously offered advice. "Your poetry must be your own". With his intense and unwavering religiosity he shared his savvy to the extent that it could be shared, with all those who sought and thought, rightly or otherwise, that they could profit by his benevolence, bounty and skill. Many of us benefitted by the inspiration even as we may have lacked the talent. Others with real aptitude burgeoned into practitioners of consequence and thanked Gamaliel for stimulating the muse.

Latterly, Seymour became editor, lecturer, critic, a driving force and authority on Guyanese and Caribbean literature, predictably. He simply unfolded and effloresced in a graduation that was energetic, systematic and inspired.

He was not a revolutionary poet in the accepted sense in the melee of turbulence in Guyanese politics, but the patriotism and nationalistic fervour inhere without shibboleths or rhetoric in the eloquent implications of "Tomorrow belongs to the People".

The literary landscape will look stranger for the absence of this silk cotton tree which, according to legend, has treasures buried under it. Seymour himself became a legend in his lifetime by hard work and the spontaneous outflow of his natural gifts. A talented husband of a talented wife, the father of talented children, he might have written for us at this time in his own words—

We revel in the memories we recall
And bless the life that sparked off all this action
And rescued us from years pedestrian...

(First heard on Guyana Broadcasting Corporation
on Tuesday, 2nd January, 1990)

LETTER TO ELMA

by Robert and Alyma Moore

Something has gone out of Guyana and that something the best Guyana had to offer. For in himself he symbolised the dignified, gracious, generous-spirited, spacious and deeply visionary side of our Country's personality—the features that made observers wonder how so difficult an environment produced such wonders of the spirit.

When we remember him we think of the line of that beautiful hymn: "Brightest and best of the sons of the morning". He woke us all up to the call of a New Day; he taught us to feel the old giants of two or three centuries ago in our blood; and he gave us a sense of mystery and radiance that came from his incandescent Christian faith.

Alyma and I first read Arthur at the end of the 1940s when we were still teenagers and our eyes were opened to the beauty around us, the majesty and grandeur that we previously looked at every day but did not behold. And he, more than anyone else, made us aware of the presence of another and more enduring world not just in the worship of the faithful in church, mosque or temple, but in the long, dark rivers, the tall branching trees, the sweep of the savannahs, and the crimson glory of the sun-sets.

We remember his fortitude: the grace with which he bore the injustice done to himself and his principled refusal to see it done to others. One grew in stature when one talked to Arthur and one felt the force of that perspicacious prayer:

Lord, give us the courage to change what can be changed; the patience to bear what cannot be changed; and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

We shall miss his voice, his boyish laughter, his gentle teasing. But we have his poetry to light us on our way and keep our vision of an unfaded world fresh and compelling. We thank God that we lived in the era of Arthur. We thank God, too, for you who gave so much to Arthur that he might give of his magnitude to us.

A CONVERSATION WITH A.J. SEYMOUR

Stewart Brown

Of course I had admired A.J. Seymour's poetry and known his status in West Indian letters for as long as I'd known anything about Caribbean literature at all. And so many people spoke of him almost reverentially that when I actually came to meet him at his home in Georgetown in May, 1988, I was somewhat in awe of the great man. But he put me at my ease very quickly, with what others confirmed to be his characteristic wit and generosity of spirit, and we spent what was, for me at least, a memorable afternoon just talking around shared interests as if we were old friends. I wanted him to read the poems of his that are included in the *Voiceprint* anthology for a projected tape-book edition, and after he'd done that I asked if I could leave the recorder on and do a formal interview. He agreed but what ensued was really a continuation of our earlier conversation and I think the extract below catches something of Arthur Seymour's style. Even in the informality and ease of such an occasion he was teaching—I had to go and look up "gravamen"! To situate this conversation in another context, the tape recorder catches, amid the noise of traffic outside and the clattering of tea-cups, Arthur's clearly much beloved wife Elma on the telephone to the Electricity Company, berating some poor official for the fact that there had only been power in the house for one hour in the last 48, and, though this was hardly his fault, bemoaning the water supply problems and other 'facts of life' in late 80s Georgetown. AJS smiled through the tirade; his life had been spent, it seemed, working around such 'local difficulties'. It was a real privilege and inspiration to meet him.

AJS: You know, first of all I've got to give you a disability. Last year my son, Guy, said, "Daddy, come and let me put you on a table in Atlanta, Georgia and let my Doctor friends look at you". And this happened and the Dr. friends told me, "Arthur Seymour, you have an unacceptably high level of sugar in your blood because you're a diabetic and this sugar destroys brain cells so you're likely to forget and to continue to forget and sometimes whole areas will not be available..." I warn you about this in advance....

SB: You must be delighted to see *Kyk-over-al* revived and coming out regularly again?

AJS: Indeed, but I'm very happy to tell you—since you know Ian—that I wrote him a letter—a letter which is for Mortality really—saying, "Please know that, since I am 74 and you are much younger, *Kyk-over-al* will belong to you and whoever you have as your co-editor as time goes by—so understand this as of now, its something we're all working on together, its something that's above us and beyond us and really it belongs to the nation".

SB: And I understand you've been working on an edition of your **Collected Poems**, recently?

AJS: Yes, well, because there was never much money I was always doing things like this, [picks up one of his pamphlets] when I did this particular one but fortunately they [Demerara Publishers, who are bringing out the **Collected Poems**] have been able to work out—with the works which have been edited and the works that have dates on, the order of things. [Picks up another small collection, **Love Song**] All my life I have been writing love songs so I put them all together in this little book... [Continues to sort through the piles]... all sorts of little things, but my frail imagination has always been particularly stimulated by religious sentiment and this comes out in so many ways.

SB: There's sometimes a Biblical 'cast' to the language and rhythms of your poetry too...

AJS: Yes, but one learns to protect oneself and one's hearers from too much of this. I was preaching on Sunday morning, my sermon was on 'Jesus as the Hope of the World'. Well all sorts of theologians have commented on this, William Barclay particularly—I have a library of Barclay's comments on the Bible and all my life I have been going through this. I have something here that you'll be interested in. [Searches through other pamphlets] Here is **What is God Saying to Caribbean Man in his Poetry**, now this was 1981 and this is a lecture, [reads] "a talk by distinguished Guyanese poet and methodist local preacher A.J. Seymour... One of the highlights of a series of activities marking the 1981 Synod..." Here is where the religion and the poetry come together and I'm always conscious of them not being far, one from the other.

SB: In the Introduction to our anthology **Voiceprint** Gordon Rohlehr writes about the influence of pulpit oration on a particular kind of voice in Caribbean poetry. I wonder how the fact that you obviously 'perform' on a Sunday to deliver your sermons, how that carries over into the way you 'perform' your poems.

AJS: It does, it must affect... And remember too that, Philipine—my mother—over the years she taught me, every day to speak to the Lord. So personal prayer is a matter of the natural fundamentals of my life you see. Take this particular talk, in this I note that Wilson Harris deals with religious symbolism in at least five of the fourteen poems of his cycle 'The Sun', and I talk like this. .. [reads] "E.M. Roach, in his powerful poem 'I Am the Archipelago' sets out his understanding of West Indian religion... and M.G. Smith has also written a poem, 'Testament'. which runs to 400 lines of mystical meditation in which philosophy and poetry are both mixed in a hymn to God... and the key thought runs as follows, "to be is to be aware of the Lord..." that sort of thing.

SB: I remember reading a Humanist pamphlet in which the author said that every night before he went to bed, instead of saying a prayer, he would read a poem. That seems to tie in with what you're saying, that there's a connection between poetry and prayer...

AJS: Yes, of course the spiritual 'gravamen' and the creative imagination are tremendously linked, in many, many ways. One hesitates to push this too far, but so many of my friends who are poets and so many of my friends who are preachers mix the two, you know, the two types of meditation. Let me tell you the story behind my poem, 'I Heard a Rooster Call'. Some years ago my wife Elma turned to me and she said, "You know, Arthur, I want to be a pilgrim in the Holy Land". My response was as usual, I said, "You know Elma you're ahead of me... I haven't thought of this yet but if you are going I will have to come too, if only to make sure that you come back home. I have to make sure that nothing disturbs you when you are there." And so we get in touch with our daughter who lives in New York and works for the U.N. and she was able to fix a group of 21 people—coloured—from just outside the New York area, going to the Holy Land for about ten days. The money was, well this was before devaluation so it was possible for us to join... So we took a plane and flew to New York and stayed the night with her, and the next day we joined the group and we found ourselves in a plane going to the Holy Land. We stayed in a hotel, The Ambassador Hotel on the Mount of Olives. That was a lovely address you know, you could send a postcard from the place! On the second or third day they said, "We want to take you to show you the place where Peter denied Jesus"... Well, "this is where the policeman sat and this is where the servant girl passed and this is where Peter was sitting..." We heard this as we looked and as we were leaving I heard a cock crow in the distance, and I said to myself 'Is this specially laid on for the occasion or is it just coincidental?' Probably it was merely coincidental, but there it was. And after hearing that we went home and had dinner and things like that. That night, at three o'clock in the morning, I was conscious that somebody was wanting to use me to create a poem about this occurrence, but if I turned on the light, of course, my wife would awaken. So I took something that I walk with most of the time, a piece of paper in a board, and I walked in to the toilet to see what would come. And this is what came; [recites, without a text]

I heard a rooster call
In gold Jerusalem
It ran throughout the world
To wake all sleeping men.

King David heard that call
In old Jerusalem
The Queen of Sheba heard

Who lay with Solomon
Once Peter heard that call
And twice it broke his heart

So when I heard that call
My heart within me stirred
So much was in that call
Come from that ancient bird

And over centuries
My heart within me stirred
I heard the call of bird
Recall the word of God
To sing throughout the world
And wake all sleeping men

So when a rooster calls
My heart will say Amen
It rings throughout the world
To wake all sleeping men.

Well I realised that the poem had come to an end and I got back into bed and slept a little. And when Elma awoke in the morning I shared the poem with her because it is my realisation that if she like anything I've written other people are likely to like it too, but if her first reaction is not very good I might have to go and have another look at the material. She said, "I like it", so when we went downstairs from the bedroom to the breakfast room I shared it with everyone there. I wasn't prepared for their response. Their response was, "We like it", and not only, "We like it" but, "We want a copy in your handwriting, Arthur Seymour", and they made me write it out fifteen times. This is a little much but they said they liked it, and if this is a measure of their liking then I must pay the price. But it turns out to be one of the few Seymour poems that I do know... and this, of course, is very good. As I say, I never found out for certain whether what I heard was coincidental and just ordinary or whether it was specially laid on, but I doubt it. And that particular poem has given me tremendous pleasure in many ways; I've found myself in a train, I've found myself in a plane, in a bus... all sorts of places and I'm talking, I say, "Let me tell you a story"—because of the tedium of waiting—and I tell the story. I try to keep to the facts and not to let it over-amplify itself—which of course easily happens—and the way in which people accept it, and the way in which they have reacted is something that gives me tremendous pleasure. As I say I realise now it is not Arthur Seymour's words really, it's somebody else's, this fellow who wanted to get me to write the poem at 3 o'clock in the morning. **He** has something to do with it.