



POUi

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## Foreword to Pouí XI

Last year we celebrated *Pouí*'s tenth anniversary; this year, we celebrate Kamau Brathwaite's 80<sup>th</sup>. Born in 1930, Kamau has only become more challenging and provocative in the years since *Rights of Passage. Missa Solemnis*, a work begun in Ghana in the 50s, was eventually presented to the Frank Collymore Literary Endowment competition in 2006. The jumping off point for the poem was Kamau's discovery of Beethoven's work of the same name, first performed on April 7, 1824 in St. Petersburg, and first heard by Kamau while an Education Officer in the Gold Coast around 1953. It is in fact a series of poems, brilliantly displaying the jazz-like improvisational effects and linguistic virtuosity for which he is famous. Of course, it won. The judges - two of whom, McWatt and Bryce, were Pouí editors (later joined by Welch after his own win the following year) - were sceptical at first. Although the judging was done blind, as soon as we started to read we knew who we were reading. How, we wondered, could it be a fair contest with an entry by one of the Caribbean's leading writers? In the event, Kamau's winning the Prize uplifted the Award, raising it to new heights of achievement and inspiration, and reminding us that Kamau is a Bajan writer as well as a world figure.

In fact his international status makes it easy to forget how much Kamau's work is inspired and informed by the landscape and society of Barbados: by his own 'Bajan' childhood in the Round House on Bay Street, overlooking Brown's beach and Carlisle Bay, and by his experience of village life at Mile & a Quarter, St Peter. These locations, of great familiarity and nostalgia for the poet, come to life in his work, especially in *Mother Poem* (1977), *Sun Poem* (1982), and *Barabajan Poems* (1994). But his work evokes all the geographies of his island home: beaches, canefields, gullies, warercourses, the boulder-strewn sea off the east coast, the sea off the west coast, hidden by expensive, foreign-owned properties...All are hallowed in his poetry, which not only evokes them but expresses his keen awareness of their ecological frailty and the negative effects of their 'development'. The Caribbean has produced no finer environmental poet than Kamau Brathwaite.

But Kamau is also a historian, whose seminal research in the area of Caribbean cultural history - especially of early Creole societies-has achieved academic prominence and benefited scholarship way beyond the Caribbean. He has also written on the influence of jazz on Caribbean writing, on alternative and innovative theoretical approaches to Caribbean writing and has commented expertly on individual writers and works. Kamau, more than anyone, deserves to be celebrated on an occasion like this, and *Pouí* is indeed privileged to be able to publish the extract from his complex and powerful work, *Missa Solemnis*, and to dedicate this issue to him.

The issue has been arranged by Mark Jason Welch in such a way as to put the contributions in dialogue with each other. So as to keep bringing us back to our central focus, seven extracts from *Missa Solemnis* are distributed throughout. Also scattered throughout are 'soundbites': short tributes to Kamau by fellow-writers. Four leading Jamaican poets - Mervyn Morris, Edward Baugh, Pam Mordecai (and her husband, Martin) and Kwame Dawes - testify to the impact of

Kamau on their own work. Two much-awarded Nigerian writers - Niyi Osundare and Funso Aiyejina - bear witness that it wasn't only Caribbean poets whom Kamau inspired to draw on oral tradition. Through these heartfelt tributes, we catch a glimpse of the reach and significance of Kamau's groundbreaking experiments with language and rhythm. Their effects can be seen in many of the pieces in this and previous issues (just look at Lynn Sweeting's poem, 'On the Edges').

As usual, we have a wide range of contributions, from work by our own Creative Writing students to pieces by well-known names and regular contributors. We especially welcome Patrick Sylvain's poem, written in the wake of the Haiti earthquake of January 2010, which takes us into an intimate space far from the frenetic media coverage of the event. We welcome too a gathering tendency away from realism towards a more poetic interpretation of reality ('The Death of The Boy With Enormous Wings', 'Moon on My Toe', 'The Crossroads', 'The Return', 'Ivory Light', 'Passage Way', 'I Promise ...', 'Severing Ties'), some of which hover between prose and poetry.

There are pieces which reflect on the poetic process ('At the Granada International Poetry Festival', 'Two Love Poems', 'Island Love'), and those which play with form ('Barbados Night', 'How to Make Love to a Dying Rican'). There's a streak of irony which runs from satire ('Wu Long Tea', 'Fireflower', 'Crochet', 'Message from on High', 'The Unspoken', 'Libertine') to a gentler humour ('All That Jazz', 'Malika'). Moving testimonies to loved ones or overlooked people ('Aajee's gift', 'Flotsam and Jetsam', '...Bloom', 'Absences 1- The Disappeared Woman', 'Tantie', 'Seventy Four', 'Lola', 'Reminiscences of the Cane Cutter's Heir'), demonstrate the power of words to memorialise the otherwise forgotten.

As always, the work meditates on love, death, nature, childhood, old age and the mystery of writing. As always, too, voices are heard from the Bahamas, Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, Haiti, St Lucia, St Vincent, St Kitts, Nigeria, the US, Canada and England. The pieces gathered here are a worthy tribute to the legacy of Kamau Brathwaite, carrying his spirit forward into a new generation.

The editors: Jane Bryce, Mark McWatt, Hazel Simmonds-McDonald and Mark Jason Welch.

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**Poui:** Cave Hill Journal of Creative Writing is the natural successor to the small magazines which nurtured the early growth of Caribbean writing – Bim, Kyk-over-al, The Beacon, etc. Funded by the Department of Language, Linguistics and Literature, UWI, Cave Hill, it is independent and has no other agenda than to be a vehicle for new and interesting writing. It makes no distinctions and has no preferences about your age, race, class, sex, religion or where you shop. All that matters is that what's in its pages should make the hair stand up on the back of your neck – the infallible test of good writing.



#### **FEATURED WRITER: Kamau Brathwaite**

Edward (Kamau) Brathwaite was born in Bridgetown on May 11, 1930, where he attended the prestigious Harrison College and went as Barbados Scholar to Cambridge in 1949. He featured regularly on Henry Swanzy's influential BBC programme, Caribbean Voices. In 1955 he took up a post in the Ministry of Education of the then-Gold Coast. He was therefore a participant in a period of significant change, since Ghana, as it was renamed, was one of the first African countries to achieve Independence in 1958, under its celebrated pan-Africanist leader, Kwame Nkrumah. He himself was immensely influenced by his encounter with oral performance forms, and his play, *Odale's Choice*, premiered at Mfantism Secondary School. In 1962 he returned to the Caribbean, first to St Lucia, then to Jamaica, where he taught History at Mona, publishing *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica* (1970) and *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (1971). He also published the poetic trilogy which established him as a major voice: *Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968) and *Islands* (1969), as well as helping to found the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM) in London, and launching its journal, *Savacou*, in 1971. That same year, as a City of Nairobi Fellow at the University of Nairobi, Edward Brathwaite visited the famous Kenyan writer, N'gugi wa Thiong'o, at home in Limuru, where N'gugi's grandmother renamed him Kamau – the name by which he has been known ever since. Since 1992, Kamau Brathwaite has been Professor of Comparative Literature at New York University, and, since its inaugural issue in 1998, Consultant Editor to *Poui*.

#### **Also Featuring:**

FUNSO AIYEJINA • PHILIP ARMBRISTER • EDWARD BAUGH • MIA BEST  
 AHIMSA TIMOTEO BODHRÁN • DANIELLE BOODOO-FORTUNÉ • VASHTI BOWLAH  
 KWAME DAWES • SONIA FARMER • PATRICIA GLINTON-MEICHOLAS  
 BRITTANI GREAVES • HELEN KLONARIS • ROBERT LEYSHON • VLADIMIR LUCIEN  
 MARK MCWATT • ALEXANDER MATTHEWS • HAZRA C. MEDICA • MARTIN MORDECAI  
 PAM MORDECAI • MERVYN MORRIS • PHILIP NANTON • SERGIO ORITZ  
 NIYI OSUNDARE • CHANTAL PEARSON-GOODING • SHANNA PERPLIES  
 TREGENZA A ROACH • SHONA SHIKIRA FOLOSA BAREL ROBERTS • NADINE ROGERS  
 VICTORIA SARNE • RIA SCOTT • A-DZIKO SIMBAOBEDIAH SMITH • LYNN SWEETING  
 PATRICK SYLVAIN • ELLEN TAYLOR • MICHELLE JUDITH THOMPSON • SONIA WILLIAMS

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## **Missa Solemnis II : Chorus**

**Kyrie eleison.**

**Christie eleison.**

**Kyrie eleison.**

**lord have mercy.**

**Christ have mercy.**

**lord have mercy.**

**Agnus Dei. qui tollis**

**peccata mundi.**

**miserere nobis.**

**lamb of God. who takes away the**

**sins of the world.**

**have mercy on us.**

**Dona nobis pacem.**

**Grant us peace...**

**Et Expecto resurrectionem**

**Mortuorum.**

**And I expect the resurrection  
of the dead.**

**Et vitam**

**Venturi saeculi**

**and the life of**

**the world to come.**

**Amen.**

**Amen.**

*A-dZiko Simba*

### **Uniform**

They dressed us in red  
I don't know what they were thinking.

It is not a colour to be worn  
it is the colour of heat  
no wonder we went to school  
with anger in our hearts  
red sweaters  
exciting  
riots in every room  
as if they never knew  
of back room brothels  
dubious women sprawled  
for dubious men  
on red polyester  
*boîtes du nuits* stuffed  
with salacious yearnings  
under crimson bulbs  
girls too young for that  
too old for this  
riding jive masters  
in hot plastic pants  
thighs stuck to  
red leather seats

they should have known  
it is not a colour to wear  
in innocence  
pumping blood to the fore  
splitting membranes  
revealing that which should be hidden  
a woman's rage  
a pure heart  
split and spilling  
red and raucous  
over the page

How could they do that?  
Dress us in red  
then tell us to behave?

*Pam and Martin Mordecai.*

## **Soundbite 5**

### **Ave Kamau.**

Late sixties, a time of fraught politics and old wines in new wineskins. Kamau and Doris came. After that nothing was quite the same, but also made more sense. Pam and Martin were in Noel Vaz's production of *Rites of Passage* at the Creative Arts Centre; we still have the marked copy of the book. Nothing like that had been seen, heard or performed by the actors before in Jamaica. Martin took Kamau's course, History, Society and Ideas at Mona. Thanks to Kamau, he got his degree. After that he wasn't the same (is still writing a historical novel to answer the question, 'where then is the nigger's / home?'). Pam wrote a whole PhD on the early books (and Walcott's). Now, having ourselves nigrated overseas, we join in the Missa Solemnis to celebrate eighty amazing years. Ave, Kamau. Vere, rara avis, sui generis. Happy Birthday!